Humbly laid at the feet of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi.

# NO MIND—I AM THE SELF

## The lives and teachings of Sri Lakshmana Swamy and Mathru Sri Sarada

DAVID GODMAN

SRI LAKSHMANA ASHRAM
NELLORE DIST., A.P., INDIA

© *Sri Lakshmana Swamy and Mathru Sri Sarada*
*Second printing 1988*

*COVER: a photo of Sri Lakshmana Swamy superimposed on a painting of Arunachala. The painting was done by Sri Lakshmana Swamy himself and the cover was designed by Mathru Sri Sarada. The painting depicts Arunachala at the time of the annual Deepam festival. Sri Lakshmana has described the significance of the light on the summit in the following words: "Completely destroying the I-am-the-body thought, the pure 'I', the first of all thoughts, dives into the Heart and experiences the Self Supreme that is one without a second. That Self is the real Arunachaleswara jyothi [light of Arunachala]. To indicate it, every year devotees light a fire on the top of the hill."*

*The back cover shows a picture of Mathru Sri Sarada sitting on the veranda of Sri Lakshmana Swamy's house.*

THE AUTHOR: *David Godman has been residing in India for over ten years. For eight of those years he was the librarian at Sri Ramana Maharshi's ashram in Tiruvannamalai. For a short period he was also editor of* The Mountain Path, *a journal which propagates Sri Ramana Maharshi's teachings. His first book,* Be As You Are, *published by Routledge and Kegan Paul, was an anthology of Sri Ramana's teachings.*

*Phototypeset and Printed at All India Press,*
*Kennedy Nagar, P.O.Box 51, Pondicherry 605 001.*
*Published by Bhanumathy Ramanadham,*
*Sri Lakshmana Ashram, Chillakur, Gudur,*
*Nellore Dist. 524412, A.P., India.*

# CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION . . . . . v
FOREWORD . . . . . ix

PART ONE
SRI LAKSHMANA SWAMY: LIFE

1 Early Life . . . . . 3
2 Visits to the Guru . . . . . 13
3 Chillakur . . . . . 26
4 Arunachala Interlude . . . . . 38
5 1954–1972: Visitors' Stories . . . . . 43
6 Sri Lakshmana Ashram . . . . . 57

PART TWO
SRI LAKSHMANA SWAMY: TEACHINGS

7 The Guru . . . . . 69
8 *Sadhana* . . . . . 87

PART THREE
MATHRU SRI SARADA: LIFE

9 Childhood . . . . . 113
10 First Instructions . . . . . 122
11 Banned from the Ashram . . . . . 128
12 Banned Again . . . . . 136
13 Adoption . . . . . 143
14 Arunachala-Siva . . . . . 152
15 Fights, Tests, Tears and Meditation . . . . . 156
16 Self-Realisation . . . . . 167
17 Mathru Sri Sarada Today . . . . . 174

PART FOUR
MATHRU SRI SARADA: TEACHINGS

18 Introduction . . . . . 185
19 The Experience of the Self . . . . . 188
20 Tests and Teaching Methods . . . . . 200
21 The Mind and its *Gunas* . . . . . 204
22 Advice to Spiritual Seekers . . . . . 208

Glossary . . . . . 222
Bibliography . . . . . 228

# INTRODUCTION

Sri Lakshmana Swamy is a direct disciple of Sri Ramana Maharshi, the great sage and Guru who taught thousands of people during the first half of this century. He became a disciple of Sri Ramana in the 1940s and eventually realised the Self* in his presence in 1949. In the years that have passed since then he has been living a quiet reclusive life, mostly in the South Indian state of Andhra Pradesh.

Mathru Sri Sarada is Sri Lakshmana's appointed successor. She came to him while she was still in her early teens, completely surrendered to him, and realised the Self when she was only 18 years old. She is now sharing the teaching responsibilities with Sri Lakshmana in the small ashram that has grown up around them.

In 1982 Sri Lakshmana asked me to write a small book about the life and teachings of Mathru Sri Sarada; he suggested that the title should be *No Mind—I am the Self*. Mathru Sri Sarada initially had no interest in the book and Sri Lakshmana experienced some difficulty in persuading her to cooperate with the venture. When he finally succeeded I began to collect biographical material for the book by interviewing Sri Lakshmana and Mathru Sri Sarada on the veranda of their house. Mathru Sri Sarada had fortunately kept a diary during the early stages of her spiritual career and Sri Lakshmana provided verbal translations of all the relevant entries. He also translated some of her letters to him, along with a tape-recording of her experiences which he made shortly before she realised the Self. I collected the teachings myself by making transcripts of her spiritual talks and conversations. The whole book was written rather hurriedly and it was never printed because there were not enough funds to spare for the project.

In 1985 Mathru Sri Sarada decided that the book should be printed to commemorate Sri Lakshmana's 60th birthday. I revised the text and expanded it by including several conversations that

* Realising the Self, which may be loosely translated as 'enlightenment', is the goal of most Hindu spiritual practices. At the moment of Self-realisation the individual self ceases to exist. What remains is a direct awareness of the reality that lies behind it. This reality, usually known as *Atman*, or the Self, is the source and substance of everything that exists.

visitors and devotees had had with Sri Lakshmana, but this publishing attempt also failed through lack of funds.

Earlier this year an American devotee donated enough money to get the book published. Mathru Sri Sarada then decided that the text should be expanded again to include a lengthy account of Sri Lakshmana's life. Mathru Sri Sarada had collected many stories about him in the previous two years and she had written them down in Telugu (her mother tongue) in a large notebook. She verbally translated all these stories for me. Sri Lakshmana occasionally added his own comments and happily responded to all my requests for supplementary information.

I have used one other source. In 1974 Sri Lakshmana's brother wrote a small booklet (56 pages) called *Yogeeswara Sri Lakshmana*. It contains a brief account of his life, along with some lengthy digressions on Indian philosophy. Because it contains many errors of fact and chronology I have been very careful about taking material from this book; the few quotations that I have used have all been verified by Sri Lakshmana himself.

The conversations which have been included in the teachings sections were collected over a period of four years (1982-86). I wrote down most of the talks from memory since very few of them were electronically recorded. In a few instances I copied down conversations from the notebooks of other devotees. Since neither Sri Lakshmana nor Mathru Sri Sarada talk very much about spiritual matters, the teachings sections are regrettably rather small. I could not have made them much bigger without introducing a lot of repetitive material.

Sri Lakshmana has gone through the manuscript very carefully (he has a good knowledge of written English) to ensure that all of the material has been accurately recorded. He took his editor's role very seriously and he has eliminated or amended many parts of the manuscript. He also translated portions into Telugu so that Mathru Sri Sarada could verify that the accounts of her experiences and teachings were correct. Mathru Sri Sarada has also read, with the aid of an interpreter, the account of Sri Lakshmana's life and suggested several changes and corrections.

A few words should be said about the various names that are used in the book. The full title of Sri Lakshmana's Guru is 'Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi'. In the various books that have been written about him he is sometimes called 'Bhagavan', sometimes 'Sri Ramana' and sometimes 'Ramana Maharshi'. I have used all three of these terms in the book. Sri Lakshmana Swamy is also called 'Bhagavan' by many of his devotees, but I have tried to avoid confusion by only using this title to refer to Ramana Maharshi. I have only used the word 'Bhagavan' as a title for Sri Lakshmana when I have quoted verbatim from Mathru Sri Sarada's writings.



Sri Lakshmana has been known by several names during the last 30-40 years. During the 1950s he was known as 'Yogeeswara Sri Lakshmana', meaning 'Supreme Yogi Sri Lakshmana', but this title has now fallen into disuse. More recently he has been called 'Lakshmana Swamy', 'Bhagavan' or just 'Swamy'. In the account of his life which forms the first part of this book I have usually called him 'Sri Lakshmana' or 'Swamy'; however, in the account of his life which precedes his Self-realisation I have merely called him 'Lakshmana', which is the name his family gave him.

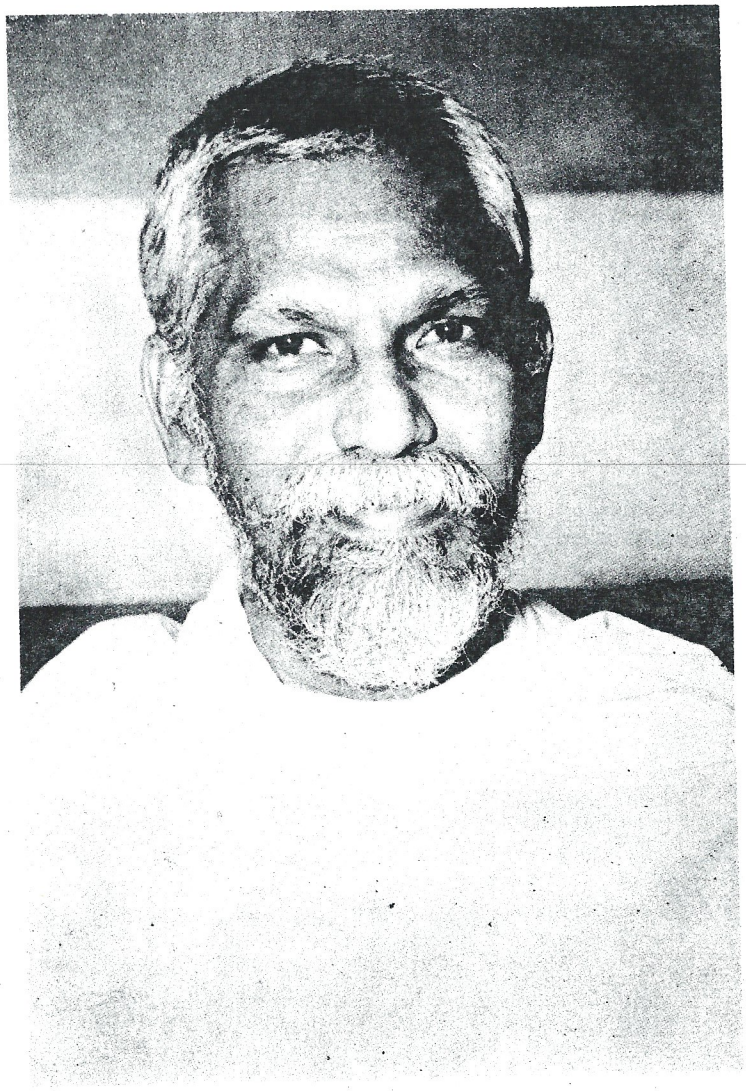
I have adopted a similar pattern for Mathru Sri Sarada. Prior to her Self-realisation I have called her 'Sarada'; after this event I have called her 'Saradamma', which means 'Sarada-mother'. Mathru means 'mother' in Sanskrit and '*amma*' is the Telugu translation of it. Most of her devotees now call her by this name.

There are a number of Sanskrit words in the text. I have translated most of them into English on the first occasion that they appear. However, I have not bothered to give immediate translations of words which need at least a sentence to explain them properly because this would break up the flow of the text. Readers who are not familiar with these terms, or who have forgotten previous definitions, can find explanations of all the technical terms in the glossary which is located near the end of the book. The glossary also includes brief entries for towns, deities and religious texts that are mentioned in the book, along with explanations of words which are rarely used by those who are not familiar with Hindu or Indian culture. After the glossary there is a bibliography which contains full details of all the books which have been cited in the text.

Readers will note that I have consistently capitalized the first letter of three words: Self, Guru and Heart. I have done this for the word Self (*Atman*) to distinguish it from the individual self; I have done it for the word Guru to indicate that the Guru is not a person, but the power of the Self acting through a human body; I have capitalized the first letter of the word Heart because both

Sri Lakshmana and Saradamma use this word as a synonym for the Self. They use the word Heart, a translation of the Sanskrit word *hridayam*, when they want to indicate that the Self is the source and centre of all manifestation. It has no particular location, it is the immanent unmanifest source from which all creation springs. There is a further reason for capitalizing these letters. It is traditional to print the word 'God' with a capital 'G'. In the *advaitic* tradition to which Swamy and Saradamma belong, God, Guru and Self are held to be identical.

I cannot conclude this introduction without thanking both Sri Lakshmana Swamy and Mathru Sri Sarada for permitting me to sit with them for long periods every day while I was collecting material for this book. It was a pleasure to listen to them reminisce about their lives and a great privilege to be able to sit in their presence for so long and absorb the grace that was constantly flowing through their physical forms.



Sri Lakshmana Swamy

Mathru Sri Sarada

# FOREWORD

As a small girl I came for the *darshan** of Sri Lakshmana Bhagavan on Mahasivaratri day. Merely by looking at him I knew that he was a great sage, but at that time I didn't know anything about spiritual matters.

My father, mother and my brothers went to have *darshan* of Swamyji early in the morning on Mahasivaratri day 1974. I did not go with them because I was afraid. But on that same day, in the afternoon, I went with my mother and looked at Swamyji as he was giving *darshan* in the Sri Ramana Gita Mandir in his ashram. Swamyji looked at me. When he first looked in my direction I was frightened because I thought that he could burn me to ashes, merely by looking at me. So, with a bowed head, I concealed myself in a corner.

After I passed the 7th standard school exams I started to visit Swamyji every Sunday. Whenever I stood before him he gave me a gracious smile. Every Sunday evening Swamyji appeared to me in my dreams, with the same gracious smile, and pulled me towards him.

Later, Swamyji asked my father if he could take me as his adopted daughter. My father and mother happily consented to this.

Swamyji tested me many times to check my spiritual progress. Swamyji's mother, his brother and some other relatives tried their level best to drive me from the ashram. I firmly withstood all the problems they created by completely surrendering to Swamyji. I told him that he was my only refuge and that I was leaving all my burden to him.

Sri Lakshmana Bhagavan, I am very happy to have had your *darshan*. You are my walking and talking God. O my divine father, my prostrations to you, for by your grace my mind is dead. By your grace I am now the all-pervading Self.

Mathru Sri Sarada

* *Darshan* means 'looking at'. To have *darshan* means to see a Guru or a temple image.

# PART ONE

## Sri Lakshmana Swamy: Life

# 1
# EARLY LIFE

About 80 miles north of Madras, just off the Madras-Calcutta highway, there is a small town called Gudur. It is a major railway junction and one of the two places in India where mica is mined commercially. Its eastern side ends on the shore of a large artificial lake which collects the monsoon rains for irrigation purposes. When the rains are heavy it covers nearly two square miles, but during the summer season, or when the monsoon fails, it often dries up completely.

Nowadays Gudur is a busy, bustling town about a mile across, but back in the 1920s it was, by modern standards, little more than a large village. It was here, at 1.15 a.m., on December the 25th 1925, that Lakshmana made his first appearance in the world. His mother, Audemma, was a devotee of Sri Rama, the hero of the *Ramayana*. She named her first son after Sri Rama himself, and her second son, her only other child, after Lakshmana, Sri Rama's brother. In the year of Lakshmana's birth December the 25th was a sacred day for all the three major religions of India. In addition to being Christmas Day, it was the Muslim festival of Moharram; for Hindus it was Vaikunta Ekadasi, a day when millions of Vaishnavite Hindus offer special worship to Lord Vishnu. It was also the anniversary of the day when Lord Krishna gave out the teachings which are contained in the *Bhagavad Gita*. Such a conjunction of sacred days is relatively rare, and it was not to happen again for 50 years.

Lakshmana's family lived in his paternal grandfather's house. Bangaraiah, Lakshmana's father, was already an elderly man when Lakshmana was born and he only lived for another year and a half. Lakshmana has no memories of him at all. After his death Lakshmana's family was looked after by Bangaraiah's father. Bangaraiah had been a minor landowner, but the income which the land generated was not sufficient to support his widow and sons. When he died Audemma was forced to take an unskilled job in a local mica factory to augment the family's income. The job, splitting mica, paid only Rs.5 ($0.40)* per month.

* All monetary conversions in this book are based on the current exchange rate of

Bangaraiah's father seems to have looked after his son's family tolerably well. The only unpleasant memory Lakshmana has of him stems from an accident which happened when he was 12 years old. His grandfather, in a fit of rage, threw a stick at him with such force that it struck him on the side of the head and nearly killed him. He immediately regretted his act, apologised to his grandson, and promised that in future he would treat him as if he were Vasudeva (Lord Krishna) himself.

Lakshmana was sent to a local primary school at the age of five. When he had completed his studies there he moved on to the District Board High School in Gudur. He exhibited no interest in any of the academic subjects which were taught at either school. He rarely did any serious studying and he only managed to pass the frequent tests and exams because he had an ability to memorise texts after reciting them out loud once or twice. Despite this talent he never managed to finish higher than half way up his class. Even this modest achievement surprised his classmates; he had a reputation for not doing any work at all and they were always surprised when he passed his exams. The only subject he showed any interest in or aptitude for was drawing. He seemed to have a natural talent for line drawings and he used to entertain his friends by drawing realistic portraits of famous figures. Art lessons formed part of the school syllabus, and it was the only subject in which he ever came top in his class.

Outside the classroom he was always an enthusiastic participant in various team games such as hockey and football, but when the games were over he never did much socialising with his team-mates. He preferred instead to sit quietly by himself. Despite this strange habit he was always popular at school, primarily because he had a keen sense of humour and an innate ability to make other people laugh.

Lakshmana never displayed any interest in religion during his childhood and early youth. His mother occasionally took him to temples when he was a young boy, but even at that age he intuitively felt that performing rituals in front of stone images was pointless. He recalls:

12 rupees to the American dollar. It should be remembered that this rate has varied between 4 and 13 in the last 60 years, and that the purchasing power of the rupee (like all other currencies) has declined enormously with the passage of time.



> Even when I was a young boy I was sceptical about gods being in statues. I remember asking my mother "How can this stone be God? God sometimes talks to devotees. How can a stone speak?" My mother told me that God only talks to the priests when a curtain is drawn in front of the image. I then asked how a stone managed to eat all the food offerings that are given to it, and she gave me a similar answer. She said that the priests feed the offerings to the god when the curtain is drawn. Even though I was very young I could not believe that such things were possible and so I grew up with little or no interest in formal religious practices.

When he was still at school, in his seventeenth year, an incident happened that was to change his life. He was sleeping in his family's house when a malevolent force appeared to descend on him. He awoke with a tremendous pressure bearing down on his chest and he had a distinct awareness that an evil force was trying to kill him. Immediately and spontaneously the Rama *mantra* (Rama Rama) erupted from within him with a great roaring sound. The evil force could not compete with its power and it vanished immediately. He had never repeated the Rama *mantra* before and it had never occurred to him that it had any power. Lakshmana had been sceptical about all matters to do with religion prior to the event but his scepticism couldn't withstand this first-hand experience. He came to the conclusion that there must be some power in the *mantra* and he began to repeat it on a regular basis. He also decided to take up the practice of *pranayama* (yogic breathing exercises). Lakshmana accepted that the *mantra* had saved him but the experience itself still puzzled him. He wanted an explanation as to why the *mantra* had been so successful in countering the evil force and he looked around for someone he could discuss the matter with. Unfortunately, there was no one in his circle of friends and relatives whom he felt able to confide in. In the end he told no one.

After this strange incident his lifestyle began to change. At 3 a.m. every morning he would get up, walk along the railway tracks for a mile or so and then jump or dive from a bridge into a river called the Tsallakalva which flowed underneath it. This habit was to result in several accidents, or near accidents, but nothing deterred him from continuing it. Lakshmana had never swum before and his first accident, being sucked into a whirlpool, occurred while he was still trying

to master the art. He was well away from the banks when it happened and there was no one else nearby who could assist him. Realising that he had insufficient strength to fight the current, he surrendered to the flow and allowed himself to be pulled down to the bottom of the river. The whirling current then spewed him out and he found that he was able to surface in the relatively calm water which surrounded the whirlpool. On a later occasion, while he was walking along the tracks on his way to the river, he caught his foot in a hole between the rails and was stuck there for several minutes. He only managed to free himself a few seconds before a train would have run him down. It should be remembered that this incident took place at night and that a train driver would have had no opportunity to see him if he was caught on the track. It was a very busy line and one early morning walker was killed in this way; Lakshmana actually found his body, in several pieces, in a pool of fresh blood, as he was walking towards the bridge. Not wanting to be discovered near the body in case he got blamed for the accident, he calmly jumped over the pieces, walked further down the track and had his usual morning swim.

Lakshmana was not undergoing this early morning programme merely for the exercise. When he emerged from the water he would sit in meditation, practising *pranayama* and doing *japa* of the name of Rama. Occasionally he would do *pranayama* while he was still in the water. This daily programme lasted about two hours; at 5 a.m. he would walk back to his house. The only time he sustained any serious injury, either during his swims or during his walks to and from the river, was when he was bitten on the toe by a poisonous snake. He immediately hacked away the poisoned flesh with a sharp stone, squeezed the poisoned blood out and then bandaged the wound with a strip of cloth that he had torn from his *kaupina* (loin-cloth).

Perhaps the most bizarre incident that happened during this period was when he encountered what he insists was a large black demon on the railway line:

> I was going down the railway track early in the morning to have my usual morning swim when I saw this great black demon slowly moving down the track towards me, but on the other side of the rails. As it passed me I could see that it was not human; it was much too big and too black. I remember that it had bells around its ankles which jingled as it went past. It paid no attention to me, it just walked slowly past me on the other side of the track.



This compulsion to rise at 3 a.m. to swim and meditate lasted for several years. When I asked him why he had taken so much trouble, and put up with so much danger and inconvenience, just to have an early morning swim, he laughed and said that it was a habit left over from his previous life.

The meditation and the *pranayama* brought about a certain amount of mental peace, but they didn't bring any answers to some of the philosophical problems that were beginning to engage his mind. He was beginning to ask questions about the nature of the world and his relationship to it, and he became aware that he was not in a position to solve such problems by himself. This generated a sense of frustration. He finally came to the conclusion that he was unlikely to make any further progress unless he had a vision of God. When that vision failed to appear his frustration increased. Rather than give in to a sense of futility that was creeping up on him he started to increase the amount of meditation he was doing. In addition to his early morning activities, if he had any free time during the day, he would sit under a tree in a local park and do *japa* of the name of Rama. He didn't tell any of his friends about these new developments. When they asked him why he spent so long sitting under that particular tree, he merely told them that it was a health-giving tree, and that when the sunlight passed through the leaves it became enriched with vitamins.

While his friends may not have noticed much difference in his behaviour, his family certainly did. His brother described the changes that were taking place in a small booklet which contains the only account of Lakshmana's life published prior to this book:

> Dispassion began to assert itself and take a firm root in him. His yearning for God strengthened his dispassion to the ephemeral objects and pleasures of the world. . . . He often blamed his *prarabdha* [destiny] which had thrown him into the quagmire of this world which is full of persons swayed by desires and sensuous enjoyments. He was at a loss to know why people run after the illusory pleasures of this transitory world.[1]

While this passage may sound complimentary, his family greeted these new developments with mixed feelings. They were particularly disturbed about his lack of interest in women and they thought that an early marriage would straighten him out and curb his increasingly ascetic tendencies. Both Lakshmana's mother and his brother tried to persuade him to marry a girl who was already related to him by marriage (the girl's family had already agreed to the arrangement) but Lakshmana rejected all their arguments and insisted that he had no intention of marrying anyone.

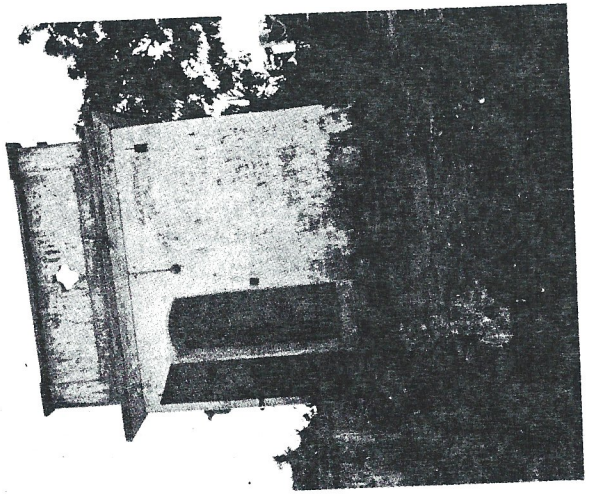
Lakshmana passed his final school exams a few months later, much to the amazement of his friends, and he decided to continue his studies at the V.R. College in Nellore, which was 24 miles north of his home town. In the holiday between finishing school and starting college he had another near-accident on one of his morning swims. He had gone to visit his brother at the nearby town of Rapur. On his first morning there, at 3 a.m., he jumped into a large well, only to discover that it was full of snakes. He made his way very gingerly to the steps and found that they too were covered with snakes. Unperturbed, he remained in the water for about half an hour and performed his usual *pranayama* exercises. At the end of this period the snakes had settled down and Lakshmana very quietly and carefully extricated himself from the water and climbed up the damaged steps which lined the well.

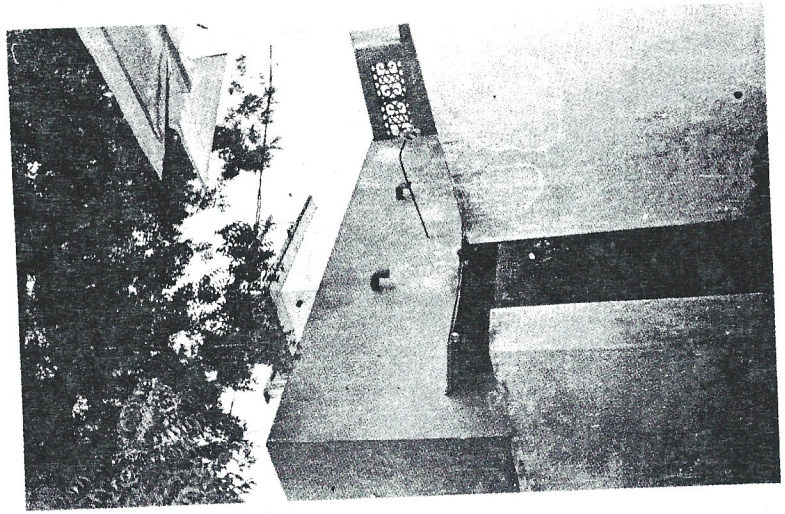
When he went to college he elected to study botany, physics and chemistry, but in the years he was there he paid little attention to the subjects he was supposed to be studying. He preferred instead to read spiritual books such as the *Bhagavad Gita* and works on *advaita vedanta*. He still continued to get up at 3 a.m., even when it interfered with his chances of passing the college exams. One evening, for example, on the day before he was due to take some important exams, he stayed up till 2 a.m. doing some last minute cramming in a friend's house. At 3 a.m., when all the other students were asleep, he decided to go for his usual swim. It was then that he found that the gate to the house was locked. Undaunted, he climbed the high wall that surrounded the building, jumped down outside and went to swim in the river Pennar. A tailor, who lived in a room behind the wall thought that he was a nocturnal thief, but he was too scared to venture out of his house in the middle of the night to do anything about it.

As his college career progressed, his desire to develop spiritually

The earliest available photo of Lakshmana, taken when he was a 19-year-old college student.

*Next page:*
Two views of Lakshmana's house in Gudur. Lakshmana was born in this house and he spent all his childhood and youth there. The photo on the left shows the front entrance to the house; the photo on the right shows a room which was built on the roof. Lakshmana was attacked by the malevolent force while he was sleeping on this roof. In later years he spent a lot of time meditating in the small room.







intensified. The increasing importance that he attached to his spiritual activities at that time can be gauged from a comment that his brother remembers him writing in a book by Vemana, a famous Telugu saint and poet: "If my mind becomes blind to realise *Brahman* and by its vagaries throws me into the clutches of *maya* [illusion], I am prepared to lay down this physical body in my quest for eternal bliss."[2]

During the February of his first year at college he had another close encounter with death. He had gone to the river Pennar to meditate and swim. At 5 a.m., when he was about to return, a large group of pilgrims came to the river to bathe. It was a major festival day and they all wanted to inaugurate it properly by having a bath in the river. Lakshmana decided to stay and watch. The river was in flood and he soon noticed that one of the bathers, a boy of about 19, was being carried away by the current. He jumped in to rescue him, although the crowd warned him not to, but he was too late. The boy sank below the surface for the last time just a few seconds before Lakshmana was able to reach him. Although he was never in any danger himself, the event made a deep impression on him. He became acutely aware that death is inevitable for all human beings, and that it may occur at any time. He decided that if death could strike him at any moment he should always be prepared for it. In later weeks and months his memory of the incident strengthened his resolution to live life without being attached to any part of it, and it increased his desire to transcend the human condition completely by realising the Self.

In the summer vacation of his first year at college he returned to Gudur and had his first major spiritual experience there. The lake by the town had dried up and he had gone there to perform his usual *pranayama* exercises. He was sitting on a small hillock which in winter was a small island in the lake. Lakshmana himself describes what happened to him:

> It was just evening. I sat cross-legged in the posture of *padmasana* [full-lotus position] in the middle of the tank* bed. Just then darkness was enveloping the place. I was doing *pranayama*. Suddenly, the mind was concentrated and became one-

*In India a 'tank' is any structure larger than a well which has been constructed to collect or retain rain-water. In this case the tank refers to the dried-up lake.

> pointed and still. There was a sudden flash of light within. The divine light shone in its full magnificence. . . . The light encircled and engulfed me. I lost all consciousness of the body. Apart from [the] strange quietness, there was total inner stillness. *Paramatma* [the supreme Self] shone in its fullest glory and splendour. This effulgence of *Atman* [the Self] drove home the veritable fact that *Atman* is God himself in this temple of [the] physical body. My joy knew no bounds as I realised that *Atman* had become my Guru.[3]

The experience was a brief one but it had given him a glimpse and a foretaste of the goal he was aiming at. He tried on many occasions to repeat the experience but it never came back. Reluctantly, he came to the conclusion that he would never be able to establish himself in a state of permanent Self-awareness through effort alone: ". . . I could not establish myself in that state of total inner bliss and peace. Then I keenly felt the imperative need of a Guru in human form."[4]

The need might have been 'imperative' but Lakshmana had no idea where he could find a competent Guru. Instead, he went back to college to start his second year and he easily slipped back into his old routine of swimming, meditation and half-hearted studying. The only difference was that he dropped the practice of *pranayama*. He had begun to use this method four years before when the evil spirit had first attacked him. No one had instructed him in the technique; he had picked it up by himself by reading a book called *Raja Yoga* by Swami Vivekananda. Lakshmana had been doing *pranayama* to control his mind and to keep it free from unwanted thoughts. After four years of practice he decided that his mind was sufficiently quiet and controlled for him to dispense completely with this aid. For the next three years his meditation consisted exclusively of *japa* of the name of Rama.

On the last day of his second year at college Lakshmana's attention was drawn to a large crowd which had congregated in and around the main lecture hall. He was not able to enter the hall itself because it was crowded with students, but looking over the heads of the people at the back of the hall he could see that the lecture was being given by his English professor, G. Subbaramaiah. Lakshmana remembers the occasion very well:



> As I was at a great distance I could not hear the words of the lecturer clearly, but surprisingly, when the lecturer pointed to the portrait [that was standing next to him on the platform] and said that the sage in the portrait was Sri Ramana Maharshi, the words rang in my ears. Till then I [had] never heard of the Maharshi. No sooner did I hear the name than I felt an irrepressible longing to see him. But I was not then aware of the place where I could see him.[5]

Sri Ramana Maharshi was in fact one of the most distinguished and respected Gurus in India. As a boy of 16 he had realised the Self, without any previous spiritual training, by a spontaneous act of self-enquiry.* A few weeks later he left his family home and travelled to Arunachala, a holy mountain and pilgrimage centre about 120 miles south-west of Madras. After a few years of solitary and ascetic living he began to attract devotees. He soon assumed the role of a Guru and he taught thousands of people between 1900 and 1950. When Lakshmana first heard of him Sri Ramana was already in his late sixties. At the time of the lecture he had a large ashram at the foot of Arunachala and thousands of followers in all parts of the world.

G. Subbaramaiah, Lakshmana's English professor, was one of Sri Ramana's more prominent devotees; he frequently visited Sri Ramana's ashram and eventually wrote a book about his experiences there. Lakshmana didn't get a chance to question him about the whereabouts of Sri Ramana because it was the last day of term, but he didn't have long to wait to find out the information. When he returned to Gudur by train the following day he saw a small booklet entitled *Sri Ramana Maharshi* on sale at the bookstore on the station platform. He purchased the booklet, opened it at the first page, and read the following *sloka* (verse) which had been composed in Sanskrit by Ramana Maharshi himself:

> In the interior of the Heart-cave the one Supreme Being, *Brahman*, shines as 'I-I', verily the *Atman* [the Self].
>
> Entering into the Heart with a one-pointed mind either through self-enquiry or by diving within or by breath control, abide thou in *Atmanishtha* [the state of being firmly established in the Self].

*This method will be described in detail later in the book.

Lakshmana had already learned enough Sanskrit to understand the meaning and it made an immediate and deep impression on him: "No sooner did I read the *sloka* [than] it was imprinted on my heart. I also learned from that book that Ramana Maharshi was the sage at Tiruvannamalai."[6] Tiruvannamalai was a town about a mile from Sri Ramana's ashram. Lakshmana soon located it on a map but he was not able, at that time, to make a pilgrimage there.

Lakshmana's college career came to an ignominious end in 1947 when he failed his intermediate (second year) exams for the second time. He returned to Gudur, moved back into the family home, and tried to devote as much of his time as possible to meditation. He came under renewed pressure from his family to get married but he successfully resisted all their arguments. The atmosphere in the house was far from congenial and Lakshmana did most of his meditation in solitary places, well away from home. He felt under no obligation to get a job because he had a private income of Rs 40 ($3.30) a month. His grandfather had died when he was 19 and the house which his grandfather had owned was jointly inherited by Lakshmana and his brother. Lakshmana rented out his half of the house and the family moved into the other half. The income from the rent was given to the family.

Over a year went by in which Lakshmana did little except meditate. Towards the end of 1948 his mother insisted that he must make a larger contribution to the family budget. A job was found for him at the A.S.R. mica company and for five months he laboured away as a clerk-typist for Rs 40 ($3.30) a month. Lakshmana had no interest in the work. At the beginning of 1949 he resigned from his job and persuaded his mother to accompany him on a trip to Sri Ramana's ashram. He knew he couldn't wait any longer because one of his aunts had already been to see Sri Ramana. She had reported that while Sri Ramana was a great sage he was also an old man who wouldn't live much longer. She described him as "a ripe fruit about to drop off the tree".

[1] *Yogeeswara Sri Lakshmana, a biography*, pp. 4–5.
[2] *Ibid*, p. 3.
[3] *Ibid*, pp. 5–6.
[4] *Ibid*, p. 6.
[5] *Ibid*, p. 7.
[6] *Ibid*, p. 8.

# 2
# VISITS TO THE GURU

The pilgrimage to Sri Ramanasramam (Ramana Maharshi's ashram) began at the local train station in Gudur. While they were waiting for the train to come Lakshmana's mother started talking to two women who were also waiting for the train. She soon discovered that they too were heading for Sri Ramanasramam. They were accompanying a man called Sathyananda Swami who was an old devotee of Sri Ramana Maharshi. When the swami heard that Lakshmana and his mother were travelling to Sri Ramanasramam for the first time he invited them to join his party. Lakshmana was delighted at this fortuitous turn of events; he felt that Sri Ramana himself had sent one of his devotees to guide him to the ashram.

The journey took all day and it was well after dark when they finally arrived in Tiruvannamalai. They spent the night at a choultry (pilgrim's guest house) and the following morning Sathyananda Swami and Lakshmana walked to the ashram. Sathyananda Swami took him in through the back gate, between the ashram kitchen and the store-room. As they were climbing the steps to come through the gate Lakshmana saw Sri Ramana walking slowly in the direction of the ashram cow-shed. When Sri Ramana saw the new arrivals he stopped, paused for a few seconds, looked at them, and then carried on walking.

Lakshmana soon discovered that he had arrived at an inconvenient time. The ashram was overflowing with devotees who had come from all parts of the country to attend the consecration and opening ceremony of the temple which had been constructed over the *samadhi* (shrine) of Sri Ramana Maharshi's mother. Sri Ramana's mother had realised the Self at the moment of her death in 1922, largely through the grace of Sri Ramana who had held her in her dying moments. She had been buried at the foot of Arunachala and Sri Ramana's ashram had been built on the land which surrounded her grave. Sri Ramana's brother, the manager of the ashram, had spent a great deal of time and money on constructing a temple over the remains of his mother. The temple was due to be consecrated a few days after Lakshmana's arrival.

Because they had arrived with an old devotee there was no problem in getting accommodation, but speaking to Sri Ramana proved to be more difficult. Lakshmana wanted to tell Sri Ramana about his experience of the Self in the tank in Gudur, but he never got a chance because there were always large crowds of people milling around him. He had to be content with having *darshan* (sight) of Sri Ramana in a large crowd of other devotees. On one such occasion he was standing by the ashram well. Sri Ramana was sitting on a bench, outside the hall where he usually slept, listening to a group of brahmin boys chant extracts from the *Vedas*. As Lakshmana looked at the scene the world seemed to lose its physical reality. He became aware that the appearance of the world was nothing but an insubstantial dream, and that Sri Ramana's body was part of this dream. As Lakshmana looked at him with this new insight and knowledge he knew for certain that the real Ramana Maharshi was not the dream-body he saw before him but the Self he had experienced in the dried-up lake in Gudur.

Lakshmana only stayed three days on this first visit. He divided his time between sitting with Sri Ramana and sitting in solitary meditation on the mountain of Arunachala which looms up behind the ashram. The visit, though brief, was enough to convince him that Sri Ramana was the Guru he had been looking for. He gave up repeating the name of Rama and started instead to do *japa* of '*Hare* Ramana'. He also became acquainted with the practice of self-enquiry, the meditation method that Sri Ramana prescribed for most of his devotees. Lakshmana found out about it by reading a small Telugu book entitled *Who Am I?*. This book was a translation of some written answers that Sri Ramana had given to one of his early devotees in 1901; it was the basic text for all new devotees who wanted to learn about the method.

It was Sri Ramana's basic thesis that the individual self is nothing more than a thought or an idea. He said that this thought, which he called the 'I'-thought, originates from a place called the Heart-centre which he located on the right side of the chest in the human body.* From there the 'I'-thought rises up to the brain and identifies itself with the body: 'I am this body'. It then creates the illusion that there is a mind or an individual self which inhabits the body and which controls all its thoughts and actions. The 'I'-thought accomplishes this by identifying itself with all the thoughts and perceptions that go on in the body: for example, 'I' (that is the 'I'-thought) am doing this, 'I' am thinking this, 'I' am feeling happy etc.. Thus, the idea that one is an individual person is generated and sustained by the 'I'-thought and by its habit of constantly attaching itself to all the thoughts that arise. Sri Ramana maintained that one could reverse this process by depriving the 'I'-thought of all the thoughts and perceptions that it normally identifies with. Sri Ramana taught that this 'I'-thought is actually an unreal entity, and that it only appears to exist when it identifies itself with other thoughts. He said that if one can break the connection between the 'I'-thought and the thoughts it identifies with, then the 'I'-thought itself will subside and finally disappear. Sri Ramana suggested that this could be done by mentally holding on to the 'I'-thought, that is, the inner feeling of 'I' or 'I am', and excluding all other thoughts. As an aid to keeping one's attention on this inner feeling of 'I' he recommended that one should constantly question oneself 'Who am I?' or 'Where does this "I" come from?'. He said that if one can keep one's attention firmly on this feeling of 'I', and if one can exclude all other thoughts, then the 'I'-thought will start to subside into the Heart-centre.

* Not to be confused with the heart *chakra* of *kundalini* yoga.



This, according to Ramana Maharshi, is as much as the devotee can do by himself. When the devotee has freed his mind of all thoughts except for the 'I'-thought, the power of the Self pulls the 'I'-thought back into the Heart-centre and eventually destroys it so completely that it never rises again. This is the moment of Self-realisation. When this happens the mind and the individual self (both of which Sri Ramana equated with the 'I'-thought) are destroyed for ever. Only the *Atman* or the Self then remains.

Lakshmana read about this method in a book he had purchased from the Sri Ramanasramam bookstore, but at this stage of his spiritual career he didn't feel attracted to it. He decided instead to continue doing *japa* of Sri Ramana's name.

After spending three days at the ashram he left his mother there and went back to Gudur by himself. He wanted to devote himself full-time to meditation but he found the atmosphere in his family's house too oppressive for proper concentration. The best alternative available to him was to go to a village called Govindapalli where some of his relations lived. The village was near the sea, about 15 miles to the east of Gudur. Lakshmana didn't want to stay with his relatives; he just wanted a quiet place where he could meditate

without being disturbed. His relatives there helped him to arrange for a hut to be built near the beach. A quiet spot was selected, away from the noise of the village and about three miles from the sea. Lakshmana paid for all the construction costs himself.

Once he moved into the hut he was able to spend most of his time in meditation. Milk was sent to him once a day from the village but he prepared the rest of his food himself, cooking it on a small fire which he built by the side of his hut. He still retained the habit of getting up at 3 a.m. to meditate and swim. Sometimes he swam in a tank near his hut and sometimes in a small river which flowed nearby. In the evenings he often walked to the beach and swam in the sea.

The local people had cooperated with him in the matter of building the hut, but many of them had advised him not to live at the location he finally chose:

> All the local people had warned me not to stay there because they said that there was a devil who tried to harm anyone who lived nearby. I wasn't worried about devils so I settled down to do my *sadhana* [spiritual practices]. After some time I heard a great noise which sounded as if all the trees in the vicinity were being blown down by a great wind. I looked around me and saw that the trunks of the trees were bending down to the ground and then springing back up again. Since there was no natural explanation for it I decided that it was this local spirit which was trying to frighten me. These spirits are harmless so long as you do not fear them, but if you become afraid they can easily kill you.

The spirit was not the only danger he had to face. There were a number of sharks in the sea and on one occasion one of them swam straight at him while he was having a swim. Lakshmana remained quiet and still in the water and the shark veered away from him at the last moment, grazing him as it went past.

His meditation was proceeding very well. He had learned to keep his mind free of unwanted thoughts and he was filling it with the name of his Guru. "On the sea-shore I did *japa* of my *Sat*-Guru's name, '*Hare* Ramana', and whenever my mind became still, that is, without thoughts, I dived in and tried to know the source of it." Lakshmana clarified this by saying that whenever his mind became completely quiet the question 'Who am I?' arose spontaneously



inside him. Whenever this happened, as if in answer to the question, his mind automatically sank into its source, the Heart, and experienced the bliss of the Self. He never made any conscious attempt to practise self-enquiry, the question 'Who am I?' just appeared inside him on a few occasions when his mind was completely free of thoughts.

His stay in Govindapalli lasted five months. At the end of that time he contracted a serious case of malaria and had to be taken back to Gudur. The doctor who examined him there decided that he was likely to die and many of his relatives came to pay their last respects. Lakshmana was not of the same opinion. He was determined not to die without seeing his Guru again. He placed a picture of Ramana Maharshi by his bedside and willed himself to stay alive long enough to see him again. He meditated on the picture throughout his ordeal and whenever he looked at it he felt as if Sri Ramana himself was laughing or smiling at him. He is convinced that it was the power and grace that flowed from the picture that kept him alive and enabled him to make a full recovery.

He was in bed for nearly two months. Towards the end of that period he became a little despondent about his lack of spiritual progress:

> The body could escape from the jaws of death, but I could not escape from the ever-yawning mouth of the tiger, ego. I could not supress the surge of egoism. How to efface it? I was much perturbed and gazed at the portrait of Bhagawan [Ramana Maharshi]. From Bhagawan's face flowed grace and compassion in abundance.[5]

As soon as he was able to walk again he told his family that he wanted to return to Tiruvannamalai to have *darshan* of his Guru. His mother and brother tried to convince him that he was too weak to travel but he refused to listen to their advice. There were some heated arguments about the matter, but when it became clear that his family would not give him permission to go, he walked out on them, vowing never to return to their house again. As he left he drew three long vertical lines on the door-frame of his house, a red one with a white one on either side. This was a symbol which indicated to his family that he had no intention of entering their house again. When his brother finally realised that he could not be per-

suaded to stay he very reluctantly gave him Rs 60 ($5.00) to take care of his immediate expenses.

Lakshmana set off at once and reached the ashram during the the Navaratri* celebrations of 1949. The second day of his visit was Vijayadasami, a festival which traditionally celebrates the triumph of good over evil. On that afternoon he went to have *darshan* of Sri Ramana in the new hall that had recently been constructed for him. The official *darshan* hours were 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. and shortly before the *darshan* started Lakshmana found a seat neat near the east entrance to the hall. Sri Ramana appeared punctually at 3 p.m. A few minutes later Lakshmana closed his eyes and unexpectedly found that all thoughts had disappeared except for the primal 'I'-thought. The question 'Who am I?' then spontaneously appeared within him, and as it did so, the gracious smiling face of Ramana Maharshi appeared within him on the right side of the chest. There was, he says, "a lightning flash and a flood of divine light shining within and without".[2] Sri Ramana's face was smiling "with more radiance than that of innumerable lightning flashes fused into one. In that ineffable bliss tears of joy welled down in unending succession, and they could not be resisted."[3] Finally, the 'I'-thought went back to its source, the picture of Ramana Maharshi disappeared and the Self absorbed his whole being. From that moment on the Self shone alone and the 'I'-thought, the individual self, never appeared or functioned in him again. Lakshmana had realised the Self in the presence of his Guru and his 'I'-thought was permanently destroyed. Commenting on his realisation many years later Sri Lakshmana said, "The 'I' went back to its source, the Self, and disappeared without trace. The Self remained alone. It is eternal peace and bliss."

Sri Lakshmana remained absorbed in the Self, without body-consciousness, for about three hours. The experience was so intense that even when he opened his eyes he found that he was incapable of either speaking or moving. He says that the realisation caused an intense churning within the nervous system and that when body consciousness returned he felt extremely weak.

When he opened his eyes and looked around the hall Sri Lakshmana noticed that everything was perfectly normal. Sri Ramana was sitting on his couch and all the assembled devotees were pur-

* A ten day festival that occurs in September or October.



suing their normal duties and activities. It was as if nothing had happened, but for Sri Lakshmana it was the major event of his life; since that day he has continued to shine uninterruptedly as the Self.

Sri Lakshmana remained where he was for another three hours. He remembers hearing the dinner bell and the noise of the Vijayadasami procession as it went around the temple, but he was too absorbed in the Self to contemplate either eating or joining in the celebrations. At 9 p.m., when he was finally able to move, he slowly made his way back to his allotted place in the mens' dormitory.

The following morning he still felt very weak. Thinking that he might feel better if he ate some food he started to walk towards the town of Tiruvannamalai to see if he could get a meal at one of the hotels* there. Unfortunately, he had over-estimated his strength and before he could find a suitable hotel he had an attack of dizziness and collapsed in the street. A friendly passer-by took him under his wing, ascertained that he needed something to eat, and guided him to a hotel on the south side of the main temple. Sri Lakshmana felt much better after the meal and he was able to return to the ashram without any further trouble.

Later that day Sri Lakshmana prostrated himself before Ramana Maharshi and handed him a note, via his attendant Venkataratnam. The note, in Telugu, simply said, "O Bhagavan, in your presence and by the quest ['Who am I?'] I have realised the Self". Sri Ramana read the note, looked at him for a moment, and then his face lit up in a radiant smile. The two men looked at each other for a few seconds, and then Ramana Maharshi asked him where he had come from. Sri Lakshmana answered that he had come from Gudur. "That's in Nellore District, isn't it?" asked Ramana. Sri Lakshmana replied that it was and no more words passed between them. Sri Lakshmana had not spoken since the moment of his realisation. After he had given his two brief replies to Sri Ramana he did not speak again for another 13 years. As Sri Lakshmana was leaving to take his place in the hall Ramana Maharshi asked his attendant to keep the note on a shelf behind him.

Accommodation was in short supply at the ashram; after four days he was asked to leave to make room for other visitors who

* In India a 'hotel' usually means a restaurant. If a cheap hotel also provides accommodation it is usually known as a lodge.

wanted to see Sri Ramana. Sri Lakshmana decided to look for accommodation nearby which would enable him to make a prolonged stay. He had no financial worries since his family had agreed to send him the Rs 40 a month which came from renting out his half of the family house. He consulted Raja Iyer, the local postmaster, and with his help he found a place about 250 yards to the south of the ashram. It was a small thatched house which was already occupied by a boy called Raghavan, but neither of them had any objection to sharing it. Lakshmana provided the money for the food they would eat, in return for which Raghavan volunteered to do all the cooking.

One of the first people to visit Sri Lakshmana in his new house was Venkataratnam, Ramana Maharshi's attendant. He told Sri Lakshmana that in all the years he had been Bhagavan's attendant he had never seen anyone present a note like this before. He was experienced enough in the ways of Bhagavan to know that the radiant grace-filled smile that he gave to Sri Lakshmana was proof enough that the claim was genuine. Ramana Maharshi had made no comment to him about the note but he had made a special point of asking him to ensure that Sri Lakshmana's needs were being attended to, and that he was being properly looked after. From that time on Venkataratnam became a regular visitor. He would come and sit with Sri Lakshmana when his services were not required in the ashram, and on one occasion he even tried to do service to Swamy by massaging his feet and legs.

Sri Lakshmana soon established a regular routine. He went to the ashram to have *darshan* of Ramana Maharshi from 9–11 in the morning and from 3–6 in the afternoon. At midday he would walk to town and eat a meal in a hotel. At the end of the afternoon *darshan* he would sit on the lower slopes of Arunachala for about an hour. Every time he went for *darshan* Sri Ramana's face would light up and break out into the same radiant smile that he had given him on the day after his realisation.

In the mornings and evenings Raghavan, the boy he shared his house with, would cook chapatis for him. The boy made a great show of being very deferential, but he was actually trying to cheat Swamy out of some of his food. Whenever he made chapatis he would make half of them very thin and the other half very thick. When it was time for them to eat he would put the thin ones on top of the thick ones, offer the plate to Swamy and say very humbly in Hindi, "First the husband eats and then the wife". Swamy would



then have to eat the thin chapatis from the top of the pile. When he had finished half of them Raghavan would eat the thick ones that were left. Swamy put an end to this practice by helping himself to the thick ones when the plate was offered to him. Raghavan got the message and from then on all the chapatis were the same size. Sometimes, if Raghavan didn't cook, or if the evening meal was very late, Sri Lakshmana would eat uncooked wheat flour and peanuts.

After about three months in Tiruvannamalai Sri Lakshmana moved to a small room in Pelakottu, a *sadhu* colony on the western side of Sri Ramanasramam. The rent was only Rs 1 a month and it was paid to the watchman of the Ganesh temple which bordered the *teertham* around which the *sadhus* had built their houses. *Teerthams*, or holy water places, are often dug next to temples and they are common features of the Indian countryside. They usually resemble the bottom half of an inverted pyramid partially filled with water. This particular one was about 50 yards square and it supplied the water needs of all the *sadhus* in the colony. Many of Ramana Maharshi's long-standing devotees had built huts in Pelakottu and Sri Lakshmana's neighbours included Viswanatha Swami, Kunju Swami and Annamalai Swami. His immediate neighbour was an old man called Tambiram. Tambiram's mother, Mudaliar Patti, had served food to Ramana Maharshi every day for many years. For a brief period while Sri Ramana was staying in Virupaksha Cave (1900–1916), Tambiram had lived with her and had helped her to collect and prepare the food that was served to the Maharshi. Unlike his mother, Tambiram had spent most of his life away from Sri Ramana's presence and he only returned to Sri Ramanasramam in the 1940s. Tambiram showed considerably less respect to Sri Lakshmana than he did to the young Ramana Maharshi. On one occasion Swamy accidentally sprinkled water on Tambiram's veranda while he was cleaning some white ants off his window frame. When Tambiram discovered it he retaliated by throwing a bucket of water in through the window, drenching Swamy who was sitting underneath it at the time.

Sri Lakshmana decided to stop going to town for his midday meal, an inconvenient round trip of over two miles, and instead paid a young girl Rs 6 a month to bring him a meal once a day. He drank milk in the morning and ate nothing at night. One of his neighbours, a *sadhu* called Govind Bhatt, sometimes gave him fruit

and curds and he occasionally went to town and bought himself some fruit. He was very much respected in Tiruvannamalai and the local shopkeepers were happy to give him good fruit at a cheap price. He was also on the payroll of an eccentric woman called Marakatha Mataji. She had a great liking for *sadhus* and she spent most of the money she earned on feeding them. When rich visitors came to the ashram she would offer her services as a cook. She was very good at her job and her employers, including at least one *maharani*, were always satisfied with her cooking. She often used to make sweets for her employers, and when she did so, she would always contrive to keep a few for the *sadhus* near the ashram. Any cash payment she received would also be converted into sweets for *sadhus*. At distribution time she always tried to give the recipients a big kiss along with the sweets. Sri Lakshmana was a great favourite of hers and she often used to ambush him with a sweet and a kiss as he was coming out of his room. Swamy often knew that she was waiting there and he frequently tried to stay in his room until she had gone away. It didn't do much good because her patience was usually greater than his. Marakatha Mataji also brought food to Ramana Maharshi, but she never got a chance to kiss him because his attendants had instructions not to let anyone touch his body.

Ramana Maharshi's health was deteriorating very quickly and the *darshan* hours were often drastically curtailed. He had a sarcoma in his arm and the toxic by-products were spreading to the rest of his body. Several operations had failed to check the damage. After one such operation he gave *darshan* lying on a couch outside the ashram dispensary. His eyes were nearly closed as Swamy approached him, but as he stood before him, Bhagavan opened his eyes and gave him his usual radiant smile. Sri Lakshmana was so entranced by the smile that he forgot to give the customary *namaste* greeting (palms together in front of the chest) and the ashram manager, Sri Niranjanananda Swamy, had to remind him to do it. After Swamy left, Sri Ramana relapsed into his former state. Ramana Maharshi always seemed to know if Swamy was in his vicinity, even if he couldn't see him. On an earlier occasion, when Sri Ramana was giving *darshan* in his new hall, his view of Swamy, who was standing near him, was completely obscured by a newspaper which one of his attendants was holding. He immediately asked the attendant to remove the paper and then beamed his usual smile in Swamy's direction.



As the *darshan* hours became less and less, Swamy began to spend more and more time sitting quietly in his room. He did *giripradakshina* (walking around the foot of the mountain) once a week, and he still sat on the mountain every evening, but his life was beginning to enter a new phase. He would often sit for hours in his room in a thought-free state in which he had no awareness of his body or the world. This tendency to withdraw into the Self became stronger and stronger as the weeks and months went by.

In April 1950 it was clear that Ramana Maharshi was about to die. The cancer had debilitated him to such an extent that he could barely move. About a week before his death Swamy walked around the mother's temple, the one which was being consecrated on his first visit to the ashram. On his way round he stopped to look at a statue of Ganesh which had been recently garlanded. As Swamy was staring at it the statue began to move in its niche. The head and shoulders started to rock backwards and forwards, and each time it rocked forwards, the bowed head of Ganesh moved nearer and nearer to Swamy. Swamy suddenly understood that if he stayed there any longer, the garland would slip from the statue's neck onto his own. Not wanting to be garlanded in this way he moved away from the statue and continued his walk around the temple.

A week later, on the evening of April the 14th, Sri Lakshmana was cleaning his room in Pelakottu when a picture of Ramana Maharshi, which was normally kept on a stool in the corner of the room, fell to the ground. Swamy put it back in its usual place, making sure that it was not in a position which would cause it to overbalance again. A few minutes later it fell to the ground for a second time. Swamy felt intuitively that this was a sign that his Guru was dead or dying. He felt a strong urge to go to the ashram, but before he could leave he lost awareness of the world and became wholly absorbed in the Self for a period of 2–3 hours. His consciousness of the outer world only appeared again shortly before 9 p.m. when he heard a great noise coming from the ashram. He then knew for certain that Bhagavan was dead. He rushed to the back gate of the ashram, the nearest gate to his room, only to find that the police had already locked it. By the time he had made his way into the ashram via the front gate Sri Ramana's body had already been removed from the room where he died and put on display outside it. Later that night, when most of the grieving devotees had left, it was taken inside the new hall.

Swamy had seen Ramana Maharshi for the last time earlier that day. On that occasion, as they looked into each other's eyes, Sri Lakshmana had experienced such a strong wave of ecstatic bliss that he became oblivious to his surroundings. Now, seeing Bhagavan's lifeless body, he experienced very little emotion. People were crying all around him and Sri Lakshmana's first reaction was that he also should shed a few tears for his Guru; but no tears came. He was unhappy that Bhagavan had died, but at the same time he was unable to cry or participate in the sorrow of other devotees because he knew that nothing had really happened. He knew that Sri Ramana was the Self before he gave up the body and that he was the same Self afterwards. Filled with this awareness that nothing had really happened, he left the thousands of grieving devotees and silently returned to his room.

Most of Sri Ramana's devotees left the area within a few days of the funeral, but since Swamy had no urge to go anywhere, he remained in his room in Pelakottu. In the weeks and months that followed his health began to deteriorate. He spent most of his time in his room in a deep state of *samadhi* in which it was impossible for him to pay any attention to his body's needs. When the girl brought him his midday meal he often ignored it. Sometimes he ate it, but mostly he gave it back to the girl to eat herself. After several weeks of living like this his body began to waste away. He started to get attacks of dizziness when he stood up and his digestive system started to malfunction. After one attack of food poisoning he became so weak that he discovered that he didn't even have the strength to pull a bucket of water out of the Pelakottu *teertham*. In his weakened state he was fortunate to survive at all. One *sadhu* whom he knew succumbed to cholera during this period and died, and there was an epidemic of malaria in the area which was also claiming many lives.

Swamy ignored all these events and continued to sit quietly in his room. When he was inside the room he only ever wore a *kaupina* (two small strips of cloth, one tied around the waist and the other covering the genitals) but none of the thousands of mosquitoes who shared the room with him ever bothered to bite him. The only other occupant of the room was a squirrel which used to sit on his lap while he was in *samadhi*. Swamy used to keep some peanuts near him and whenever he emerged from his *samadhi* state the squirrel would eat a few out of his hand.



News of Swamy's weakened condition reached his relatives in Gudur. Despite the previous quarrels they were still concerned about him and they asked him to return to Gudur where he could be properly looked after. Swamy declined the offer. Some time later his mother and brother came to visit him for a few days. When they discovered the extent to which he was neglecting his body they renewed their attempts to get him to come back to Gudur. Sri Lakshmana's brother offered to build a hut for him where he could live by himself; he also undertook to provide him with food. Swamy again refused, saying that he didn't want to leave Arunachala, and his brother went back to Gudur without him.

Sri Lakshmana spent a total of nine months in Pelakottu, mostly just sitting in his room. Towards the end of this period his skin turned yellow, and it stayed that colour for the next three years. Around October 1950 Sri Lakshmana finally admitted to himself that he was not capable of looking after his body any more. He had no one to take care of him and he was never aware of his body for long enough to do the job himself. Reluctantly, he decided that he would accept his brother's offer, go back to Gudur and let his family look after him.

*References:*

[1] *Yogeeswara Sri Lakshmana, a biography*, p. 10.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 12.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 12. The words in quotations 2 and 3 come from Sri Lakshmana himself.

# 3
# CHILLAKUR

When Sri Lakshmana had his first brief experience of the Self at the age of 20 he had a brief glimpse into his own future. He foresaw that one day he would have an ashram near the place where he was having the experience. When he went back to Gudur he knew that he was going back to fulfil that particular destiny. He had not told his family about his brief vision of the future, but he did tell the story to one of the boys he went to college with. That particular boy had seen one of his friends die of cholera and the shock had affected him deeply. He had started to meditate and to live an ascetic lifestyle, but Swamy could see that it was only a temporary phase. He told the boy the story of his glimpse into the future and jokingly remarked that his friend could come and see his ashram as soon as it was built. The boy soon resumed his normal lifestyle and Swamy told no one else about his future ashram.

When Sri Lakshmana arrived back in Gudur he discovered that the hut that he had been promised had not been built. This didn't worry him because he knew that it would only take a few days to construct something suitable. He selected the site for the hut himself and then went to live in his brother's house for a few days while the construction work was in progress. Swamy had selected a site just outside the village of Chillakur, about 1½ miles from the town of Gudur and about a mile from the place where he had had his first experience of the Self. It was a desolate uncultivated spot which was shunned by the local people because they feared that there was a devil living in the area. No one lived there and it was only visited by the patrons of a local toddy shop. Toddy is an alcoholic drink which is made by fermenting a juice which is extracted from the trunks of palmyra trees. There were many such trees in the area and they supplied the toddy shop with its raw material.

The hut that was constructed for Sri Lakshmana had mud walls and a roof that was made of palmyra leaves. On one side there was a bathroom, an enclosed space that contained a brick and cement tub. Water was poured into this tub every day from outside the bathroom. He could bathe inside this space, but since there was no



plumbing he had to use the bushes outside as a toilet. There was no electricity, and when Sri Lakshmana first moved in, there was no furniture, only a single mat on the floor. There were two small windows near the top of the wall and in front of the hut there was a small fence which had been constructed out of branches taken from the local thorn bushes.

Swamy made no complaint about the primitiveness of the conditions. The only additions he made were a picture of Arunachala which he painted on the wall and a comment underneath which read 'Who am I? I am that'. Swamy moved into the hut at the end of October 1950 and was soon spending nearly all his time in a state of Self-absorption that was so intense that he rarely became aware of either his body or the world. He sat motionless in the *padmasana* position for 20 hours each day and lay down on the mat for the other four hours to give his back and leg muscles a chance to rest. The hut was infested with poisonous snakes and scorpions but Swamy ignored them, and for the most part they ignored him. His only serious accident occurred when a scorpion bit him in the eye while he was resting on the mat. The eye swelled up immediately and for several days Swamy thought that he would lose the sight in that eye; he was in great pain, and obviously seriously injured, but it never occurred to him to seek medical treatment. After four days the swelling subsided and he discovered that his sight was unimpaired. To avoid a repetition of this accident a bench was provided for him so that he could have his rest away from the snakes and scorpions that crawled on the floor. In one of his rare moments of normal waking consciousness he made a half-hearted attempt to drive away the snakes by flicking water at them. The snakes drank the water and then danced in front of him, as if asking for more. After that he left them alone.

Sri Lakshmana soon found out that the villagers' fear of an evil spirit in the area was well-founded. He discovered that it was inhabiting a banyan tree a few hundred yards away from his hut. It made a big noise around midnight every night, and if any unfortunate travellers were in the vicinity of the tree at that time it would kill them. Swamy says that it wasn't killing people out of malice; it was just lonely and wanted other spirits to play with. After Swamy had been living in his hut about three months it disappeared and never returned. The local villagers came to the conclusion that it was

driven away by the power that Swamy was radiating. Swamy himself has no idea why it went away.

Swamy decided that he wanted to spend all his time alone. He never let people inside the hut and he restricted his toilet trips to the middle of the night when he was sure that no one could see him. His mother used to come at 7 a.m. every morning with a small quantity of fruit and milk, the only food that he ate, but even she was not allowed in. She used to put the food on a ledge just inside the window and then leave. The quantity of food that she brought was very small, but it was often too much for Swamy. Sometimes he would remain absorbed in the Self all day and the food would lie uneaten by the window. Even when he was functioning normally he rarely felt hungry and he would frequently give the milk to one of the rats that shared the room with him.

Swamy's mother had told some of the local people about him: how he sat all day in *padmasana*, that his skin was bright yellow and that he ate virtually no food at all. This established his reputation for being a great yogi and many of the local people tried to get to see him to have his *darshan*. Swamy had no interest in playing the role of a yogi for the general public and he steadfastly refused to come out of his hut, or allow anyone in to see him. Paradoxically, his refusal to become a public figure only increased his reputation; for the next few years he was constantly beseiged by people who wanted to have his *darshan*.

Sri Lakshmana has vivid recollections of this period, even though he was without body-consciousness for most of the time. He often tells stories about this period of his life and the following comments are taken from a talk he gave in 1982:

> When I was living alone in that small hut near here I hardly ate for a period of two years. I had no body-consciousness for most of that time and so the idea 'I am hungry' could not arise. The body needed nourishment and without it it wasted away. Hunger is an idea that arises in the mind. As there were no thoughts there was no impulse to feed the body, so it gradually got weaker and weaker. I was given a little quantity of milk each day but I cared so little for food in those days that I often gave it to a rat who shared the hut with me.
>
> Because I stayed in the hut all the time, and ate very little, I soon acquired the reputation of being a great yogi. Thousands flocked to see me because they thought that someone who stayed in one room and never ate must be a great holy man. When I moved into this house and started to act normally and eat normally, most of these so-called devotees stopped coming. They thought that I had been spoiled. Anyone who wants to acquire a great reputation should stay in one room and stop eating. Such an achievement has nothing to do with Self-realisation, but in this country anyone who can perform such a feat will be worshipped as a god.



Many people thought that Swamy was doing intensive meditation or *tapas* during this period but these ideas sprang from a misunderstanding of the state that he was in. Ever since his realisation he had known by direct experience that he was the Self. This Self-awareness remained unaffected by the transient states of waking, dreaming and sleeping. While these three states continued to come and go he never identified with them; instead he was continuously aware of himself as the Self. This awareness was the same whether he was dreaming, sleeping, in *samadhi*, or functioning normally in the world. No effort or meditation was needed to sustain this awareness; it was automatic and continuous because it was the direct and unimpeded experience of his real nature. Meditation is only necessary or possible for those people who are not in this state. Swamy makes this clear in the next quotation:

> There is a man in this state called Balayogi.* He has been sitting continuously in some kind of trance-like state, twenty-four hours a day, for nearly 40 years. He says that he is meditating. He may be experiencing some kind of blissful state, but if he is still meditating then he has not realised the Self. The *jnani* does not meditate because there is no individual self in him who can meditate, and nothing apart from him to meditate on. The *jnani* just remains as he is, the Self.

As the weeks went by the number of visitors to Swamy's hut increased. Many people came to walk around it, partly as an act of veneration, but mostly because they wanted their desires fulfilled.

*These words were spoken in 1982. Balayogi died in 1985.

One woman brought a baby which had diarrhoea. She walked around the hut all night with the baby in her arms and in the morning the diarrhoea had gone. In another case, a man walked around the hut every night for an hour saying that his head felt like it was being split with an axe. After seven days he announced that he was completely cured. Swamy himself did nothing to help these people; if any of them experienced miraculous cures it was either because of their faith in Swamy, or merely a product of coincidence. However, when the miracle stories were widely reported the human traffic moving around his hut increased. Some of the people wanted to see him, as well as to walk round the hut, and they waited behind bushes in the middle of the night in the hope of catching a glimpse of him as he went out to the toilet. Not all the visitors were friendly though; some men from the local village came to laugh at him. They threw stones at his hut and jeered at him, shouting, "Why don't you come out? Why don't you speak? Why don't you give *darshan*?"

Swamy decided that most of the people would stop bothering him once they had had a good look at him. In answer to a devotee's request, he agreed to give a *darshan* and announced, via a note, that anyone could come and see him on Sivaratri day, a major Hindu festival that occurs between the middle of February and the middle of March.

On the appointed day thousands of people turned up to see him. Swamy obliged them by sitting on a bench in front of his hut from morning till evening. A large number of volunteers stood five yards in front of the hut with linked arms to prevent him from being mobbed. Even so, the line broke at one point and a twelve-year-old girl was trampled in the rush. When Swamy saw what was happening he stood up, an action which immediately quietened the crowd. The girl was helped to her feet and it was discovered that she hadn't sustained any serious injuries.

The *darshan* was a great success for all concerned. The local people went away happy and Swamy found that far fewer people came to bother him. He decided that most of the casual visitors would leave him alone if they knew that they could see him occasionally. He therefore announced that he would give *darshan* on Sivaratri day each year.

The once a year *darshan* proved to be insufficient to meet the demands of the local people. On the morning of his birthday that year (1951) a large number of people came from Gudur and re-

Swamy at 25: taken in 1951 during Swamy's first public *darshan*. The door of his hut is in the background.

Swamy at 28: taken on his visit to Gudur while his hut was being repaired.



quested that he come out and see them for a few minutes. Sensing that the crowd might get angry if he didn't appear, Swamy reluctantly agreed. By evening the word had spread in Gudur that Swamy had come out to see some visitors because it was his birthday. A large party of 500 women, accompanied by a few men, walked to his hut and insisted that they too should be given *darshan*. This time Swamy refused to come out. The crowd, refusing to be deterred from its intention of having *darshan*, hit upon a novel way of getting to see him. The mud walls of the hut were quite low and the beams and supports for the leaf roof rested on top of them. The 500 women positioned themselves at strategic points around the hut and tried to lift the roof completely off the building so that they could peer over the walls and have a look at Swamy. When Swamy discovered what they were trying to do he admitted defeat and opened his door. His intention was to come out and see the women, but when the door opened, the weight of the pressing crowd, all eagerly converging on him, pushed him back into the hut. Within a few seconds he found himself trapped in a corner by about 60 agitated women. The women outside the hut were even more agitated because they had not been able to get in, and it was some time before some semblance of order was restored. Swamy sat in his corner and looked helplessly at the confused scene in front of him: "There were no volunteers to help me, and since I was keeping *mouna* [silence] I couldn't say anything. I just sat down and waited to see what would happen." Eventually, the women formed themselves into a line. One by one they all appeared before him, had his *darshan*, prostrated and then left. Swamy was sitting cross-legged on the floor with the soles of his feet sticking out on each side. One woman touched both soles simultaneously with her index fingers and then rubbed the fingers on her face, just under each eye. All the women behind her thought that this was a good idea and they all adopted the same practice when their turn came. Swamy didn't like being touched and he tried to deter the women by closing his eyes, looking as severe as possible, and pretending that he was in *samadhi*. The rest of the women suddenly became afraid. Thinking that he was angry with them, and that he might put a curse on them if they offended him any more, the rest of the women restricted themselves to a *darshan* and a prostration. When the last of the women had prostrated and left he thankfully closed his door and went back to his life of solitude. He realised that the events of the

day had set a precedent for birthday *darshans*, but he didn't want large crowds to descend on him again in such a disorganised way. He therefore announced that his birthday would also be a public *darshan* day.

In subsequent years the crowds were even bigger and the *darshan* days became something of a local carnival. One year the Government set up an exhibition of agricultural equipment, and a portion of Swamy's land* was ploughed up to demonstrate the new machinery to the farmers. On another occasion an Indian film star came and gave a classical Indian dance performance near Swamy's house. Special shops and temporary eating places would always be constructed several days in advance of the *darshan* days, and on the day itself, tens of thousands of people would come from all over South India. From the second year on a queueing system was brought into operation, and all these who wanted to see Swamy would form a long line and walk past his bench at a slow walking pace. Swamy would sit patiently for the whole day, but every hour or so he would go back into his hut and have a bath because the presence of so many people, all thinking of him and staring at him, caused a burning sensation in his skin.

When the crowds finally went away Swamy would go back to his solitary, reclusive life. He guarded his privacy so strictly that even his mother was only allowed to see him on *darshan* days. Swamy was not keeping away from devotees as a matter of principle; he told me that if any good devotees had come to his hut seeking Self-realisation he would have been happy to teach them. Apparently none came during this period and so no teachings were given. Swamy says that the people who came to his hut were either curiosity seekers or people wanting their desires fulfilled. He had no interest in either category of visitor. Swamy has a particularly low opinion of the people who came to see him on *darshan* days. When he reminisces about this period he usually refers, disparagingly, to the people who came to see him as 'the mob'. He sometimes adds, rather jokingly, that the people around his hut on *darshan* days were packed together so tightly that if anyone had thrown a handful of sand over their heads not a single grain would have reached the ground.

*This was in the mid 1950s. At that time Swamy was living on a nine-acre plot which had been given to him by one of his devotees.



Swamy's habit of not speaking was also a response to the spiritual immaturity of the people who came to see him. I once asked him why he had remained silent for so long and he replied that the people who came to see him were not capable of understanding the experience of the Self; he said that since he was not able to articulate it in words he had no alternative but to remain silent. He also pointed out that Ramana Maharshi had gone through a similar period shortly after his own Self-realisation. Swamy's physical response to Self-realisation was in fact remarkably similar to Sri Ramana's. When Ramana Maharshi realised the Self he spent most of the following three years in a deep state of Self-absorption, and for 10–15 years after his realisation he rarely spoke at all. T.K. Sundaresa Iyer, who visited Sri Ramana twelve years after his realisation, reported that the number of words he spoke each day "could easily be counted".[1]

In between the *darshan* days Swamy ignored all the casual visitors and sat quietly in his room; he never made any attempt to attract devotees. While he was sitting there he had become aware that eventually a young girl would come to him from East Gudur. Swamy knew that this girl would be spiritually advanced and that she would be ready for Self-realisation when she came. He was content to sit quietly, awaiting her arrival. He had a rough idea of what she would look like because he had seen an image of her as a 10–12 year old girl while he was sitting in his hut. Swamy had no idea how long it would be before she came, he only knew that one day she would come to see him. Twice a year, on *darshan* day, he would scrutinise the line of people as it filed past his hut, but he never saw anyone whom he considered to be an advanced devotee, and none of the visitors corresponded to the image of the girl he had seen. The girl from East Gudur was Sarada, but Swamy was not destined to see her for more than 20 years.

The only good devotee he had during this period was a female rat who shared his hut with him. Swamy often gave her milk to drink and each evening she would come and sit on his lap and have ecstatic fits of laughter. Sri Lakshmana says that she was a very advanced devotee who had been reborn as a rat. One evening, after she had sat laughing on Swamy's lap, she climbed up one of the mud walls, looked at him, and had another ecstatic fit of laughter. As she paused on top of the mud wall to have a last look at him, Swamy saw the smiling face of Ramana Maharshi superimposed

on her own. He knew then that this was her last day on earth. She died later that night and Sri Lakshmana is certain that as she passed away she realised the Self. The following morning three baby rats, presumably the offspring of the deceased rat, appeared in front of Swamy. They stood in a line on their back legs with their front paws, palms upward, stretched out towards him. Swamy says that they were crying and praying and he wondered how they had learned to behave like this. They only appeared before him once and after that he never saw them again.

Sri Lakshmana's privacy was still occasionally disturbed by visitors who wanted to talk to him or have his *darshan*. One man came and called out to Swamy, "You are a *jnani* [one who has realised the Self] and I am also a *jnani*. You must come out of the hut and give me *darshan*." Swamy would normally ignore such people when they came, but on this occasion he passed a note out through his window which read, "If we are both *jnanis*, who is there to give *darshan*, and to whom?". The man stayed about an hour and then went away. Other people were far more persistent. One such man turned up at 8 p.m. one evening in a slightly drunk condition. "Swamy!" he cried, "I am your boyhood friend. You are now a great swami but I am a bad man. Why have things turned out like this? Make me like you. Please give me your teachings." The man was in fact a childhood acquaintance of Swamy, but he had not known him very well. When he first started to shout outside the hut Swamy ignored him, but when it became clear that he was not going to leave without some sort of answer, Swamy wrote a *sloka* from the *Bhagavad Gita* (chapter 6, verse 5) on a slip of paper and passed it out through the window. There was no light in or near Swamy's hut so the man had to take the note to the toddy shop nearby to read it. The verse read: "Let a man lift himself by himself; let him not degrade himself; for the Self alone is the friend of the self and the Self alone is the enemy of the self." The message, although appropriate, was much too abstruse for a man who was partly drunk and who had no knowledge of spiritual philosophy. He returned to Swamy's hut, shouted that he didn't understand the message and asked Swamy to show him what he should do. This time Swamy made no reply. The man then became angry and started to abuse him. Finally, he threatened to burn the hut down if Swamy didn't answer his questions. When Swamy still declined to give an answer he took out a matchbox and was about to strike a match when he saw a huge cobra on the roof of the hut. It was no ordinary snake;



it appeared to him to have five heads. As the snake started sliding towards him he panicked, dropped his matchbox, and started running towards Gudur. The cobra followed him and apparently moved just fast enough to keep him in sight. The man looked over his shoulder several times, and each time he saw that the five-headed cobra was still pursuing him. On the last occasion he saw it he was half a mile from Swamy's hut.

This man still lives in Gudur and he is still insisting that a five-headed cobra chased him all the way back to town. Whatever the truth of the matter it was certainly a traumatic experience for him. He gave up drinking, reformed his character a little, and years later, when Swamy was more accessible, he visited the ashram a few times to have his *darshan*.

Another interesting visitor during this period was a Muslim *mouli*, or holy man. He was only 21 years old but he already had a large following, and he was famous for his ability to exorcise spirits and to curse people. Both feats were performed through the power of his *mantras*. He had been a *sannyasi*, under a vow of celibacy, since he was 17 years old, but neither his fame nor his talents had brought him any happiness. Thinking that Swamy might be able to help him, he came to Gudur with a few of his followers. Because he had some rather embarrassing things to admit to Swamy, he asked his followers not to accompany him all the way to Swamy's hut. After making sure that they were too far away to hear what he was saying, he stood under Swamy's window and started to recount his problems:

"I have been a celibate *sannyasi* since the age of 17, but I am finding that I cannot control my sexual impulses. What should I do about this? Please could I have a picture of you? I think that if I did *puja* to your picture I would be able to control my mind. You are a great *mahatma* [great soul] and you could easily help me if you wanted to. I am surrendering to you. Please help me."

The young man continued in this fashion for some time but no answer was forthcoming from Swamy. Meanwhile, word had spread that the famous Muslim holy man was in Chillakur and many of the Muslims from Gudur came out to see him. The arrival of these people interrupted his attempts to elicit some advice from Swamy. He decided that he should first give *darshan* to his own followers and so he sat in front of Swamy's house for several hours receiving all the local Muslims who had come to see him. At midnight, when they had all finally gone away, the *mouli* approached

Swamy again and repeated his request for help. When Swamy still declined to give an answer he got angry and summoned some of his followers. "If you are not going to give me *darshan*," said the *mouli*, standing outside the door, "I am going to take the door off its hinges and come in." When Swamy still refused to give him *darshan*, or give him an answer, he ordered his followers to break the door down. Fortunately, his followers were more afraid of Swamy than they were of him, and they all refused to help him to break in. Not daring to launch an attack by himself, the *mouli* retired for the night. He slept nearby and the next morning at 6 a.m. he was back outside the hut with a new plan. He stood outside Swamy's window and tried to remove the screen that was preventing him from seeing Swamy by the power of his *mantras*. He uttered the *mantras* and then made a great show of catching them in his hand as they came came out of his mouth. Then, continuing the same elaborate game, he pretended to crumble the *mantras* up with his fingers, collected the fragments on the palm of his other hand, put his mouth next to that palm, and then blew the little pieces of the *mantra* at the screen. He did this several times. Nothing happened and the screen remained firmly in its usual place. When he realised that his *mantras* had failed he started to cry. At this point Swamy finally relented, wrote him a note and passed it through the window.

> It is better for you to marry. *Brahmacharya* [the state of celibacy] is very good, but it is difficult unless you have practised in previous lives. You should enter *grihastha* [the married, householder state], but you should remain in it like a drop of water on a lotus. You should not be touched by pleasure or pain. In due time you can enter the *vanaprastha* state [living alone and devoting all one's time to spiritual disciplines].

The young *mouli* was very pleased with the note. He told Swamy, "My elders told me the same thing, but I didn't believe them. Now you have told me I know that it is true. Now I am happy." The young man then left with his followers and Swamy never saw him again.

Towards the end of 1953 the roof of Swamy's hut had become so severely damaged by white ants that his family decided to put up a new one. Swamy was taken to Gudur by car, the first time he had left his hut for three years, and he spent the day at his family's house while the new roof was being erected. When he returned in the



evening, along with his family and some devotees, it was discovered that the key to his hut had been left in Gudur. While everyone stood around wondering what to do Swamy pointed to one of the devotees, a local Taluk office clerk, and indicated by sign language that one of the keys that was concealed in his pocket would open the lock on the door. The man produced his keys and found, as Swamy had predicted, that one of them fitted the lock. I asked Swamy how he could have known about the keys. He shrugged his shoulders and said, "The knowledge just came to me. I knew it was true so I pointed at his pocket." A similar incident happened many years later when he was giving *darshan* regularly once a week. After one such *darshan* he returned to his house and discovered that he had lost his key. It was evening and several devotees unsuccessfully searched the ground in an attempt to find the key before nightfall. Swamy was watching them from the veranda of his house when suddenly, mysteriously, the key materialised in the palm of his hand. Without telling anyone how the key had appeared, he announced that he had found it, called off the search and went back into his house.

Strange incidents like this often happen around *jnanis*, but they never accept responsibility for these 'miracles' or claim that they have performed any supernatural feat. Swamy says that the power of the Self may cause inexplicable things to happen in his presence, but he stresses that he never attempts to make such phenomena happen. He is contemptuous of all people who seek or display supernatural powers since he feels that these acquired powers (*siddhis*) are only products of the ego. He says that when the individual self dies the Self alone remains; there is then no one left to perform the *siddhis*, and no other people to display them to. Because the *jnani* knows that whatever happens happens by and through the power of the Self, he never accepts responsibility for miraculous events that happen around him. Swamy never claimed that he had made the key appear (or the five-headed cobra) because he knew they were spontaneous manifestations of the Self. It is important to remember that Swamy's fame and popularity in the 1950s derived almost exclusively from his ascetic lifestyle and not from any miracles he performed. As he himself has said, "When I started to live normally, all these people left me alone".

*References:*

[1] *At the feet of Bhagavan*, p. 17.

# 4
# ARUNACHALA INTERLUDE

Early in 1954 Swamy left his hut and went back to live at Arunachala. His mother accompanied him, but after a few days she became so sick that she decided to return to Gudur. On the day that they went there Swamy and his mother arrived too late to get any proper accommodation. His mother slept in the Bose compound while Swamy spent the night lying on a bench outside the Draupadi temple that is located on the *pradakshina* road, a few hundred yards from Sri Ramanasramam. There was a termite hill and a snake shrine in front of the temple and Swamy sensed that, unlike most shrines of this type, this one had a live snake in it. At 1 a.m. Swamy woke up and discovered that the resident cobra had come for his *darshan*. Its head, a few inches from his face, was raised off the ground, its hood was spread and it was swaying gently to and fro. The cobra had no aggressive intentions; after dancing in front of Swamy it went quietly back to its hole in the termite hill.

The next day Swamy rented a room in the Bose compound, a small group of houses about 200 yards from the main gate of Sri Ramanasramam. His mother asked him to start eating cooked food because she had been told that a doctor in Gudur had predicted that Swamy would soon die if he didn't supplement his meagre diet of milk and fruit. Swamy accepted her advice and for the first few days his mother cooked him a rice meal every day. When she became ill and went back to Gudur Sri Lakshmana did the cooking himself. He used to cook and eat at about 10 every morning and then spend the rest of the day in various caves on the mountain of Arunachala.

Ramana Maharshi had spent the whole of his adult life on or near the mountain and he had frequently declared that Arunachala was the Self and the spiritual heart or centre of the world. It was for him a place where God himself manifested in the form of a mountain. Sri Ramana regarded Arunachala as his Guru and he could never be persuaded to move more than 1½ miles from its base during the whole of his 54 years there. Swamy had the same high regard for the mountain; after realising the Self he knew, by direct



experience, that Arunachala was everything that Ramana Maharshi had claimed it to be. When Sri Lakshmana made this trip to Arunachala it had been his intention to spend the rest of his life sitting quietly on the mountain.

There was great consternation in Gudur when he communicated his intentions to his family and devotees. Letters were written begging him to return. One of them contained an offer from a devotee called T. Ram Reddy who wanted to give Swamy a nine-acre plot near his hut. His mother was also trying to persuade him to go back to Gudur. While she was with him at Arunachala she suggested that he spend part of his time in Gudur, being looked after by his family, and the remainder of his time at Arunachala. The following letter, written to his brother, was Swamy's response to these suggestions. The tone of this letter, and of the ones which follow, is rather aggressive. When Swamy read the text of these letters while I was collecting material for this book he said that he had to write in such an unequivocal way to make sure that his family got the message that he didn't want to return.

> [You] may think of bridging the gulf between *samsara* [worldly life] and *sannyasa* [complete renunciation] to facilitate spiritual seekers to live for some time in *samsara* and some time in *sannyasa* by rotation. Such a thing is impossible. Even [if] all the sages of the world join together and were to conceive of erecting such a bridge they will be utterly deluding themselves. . . .
>
> The atmosphere in Gudur town is not suitable for spiritual seekers who practise yoga. I have nothing to do with the *asramam* [ashram] you are going to build for me. Mother is not doing well. She is suffering from pain in the stomach. I cannot leave Arunagiri [Arunachala]. Why should mother, in her indifferent state of health, remain here? I shall send her back. This life is futile. I do not care for the caresses you people shower on me. Unless there is persistence and perseverance it is impossible for one to acquire *jnana*. Yoga practice is, as it were, treading on a razor's edge. It is not only a long and arduous task but also a perilous one. Constant vigilance is an indispensable requisite for it. It is so difficult. . . . You may acquire riches and get things done. But I am a poor

man. All my property is this *koupeena* [loin-cloth] and this towel. If you do not send me M.O. [money order] I shall go for *biksha* [begging]. If [food from] *biksha* is not forthcoming I shall cast off this corpse at the lotus feet of Bhagawan. "There are no others to mix with. Self is the only reality", says Bhagawan.[1]

Swamy's wishes were ignored. T. Ram Reddy gave the land and some devotees started to put up a house for Swamy on it. Swamy indicated his disapproval in his next letter:

I cannot leave the lotus-feet of Bhagawan. It appears that Bhagawan himself would not leave me. So, I thought of staying in the Bose buildings for some time. It is a mistake to think of the future. Nothing happens as we think. Therefore let us leave everything to the shoulders of Bhagawan and be mute observers. For the present stop constructing a room for me. Who can understand the ways of God? We go the way he leads, we play as he directs and we act as he commands.

Why do you again question about the future? When one sees a cinema picture for the second time . . . [one] forsees how the incidents of the story take their turn. Similarly, *jnanis* forsee something . . . [of] the part they are to play in the drama of their life.[2]

His mother, safely back in Gudur, expressed her concern about his well-being. She felt that he was not capable of looking after himself and urged him to come back to Gudur. Swamy again declined:

I am a solitary soul. Bhagawan alone is my refuge. Just as a devoted wife cannot live apart from her husband, I cannot live leaving the lotus feet of Arunagirinatha [Arunachala]. Mother, caught in the inextricable net of *maya* [illusion] may grieve. This is ignorance. Mother is too much bothered about her young son. She apprehends what would happen to me if she does not cook food and serve me. . . . Poor Mother! What? Are all the orphans on earth dying? Does not God who gave us life know [how] to protect us? She seems to usurp God's responsibility and take it on herself and suffer. Is this not *maya* mysteriously manifesting itself?[3]



The letters asking him to return continued to arrive. His brother wrote to him, asked him to return to the house that was being built for him, and told him that all the devotees there were praying for his return. Swamy sent the following reply:

Attachment is the cause of all our worries. A detached man is always in solitude. Do not think about the future and put yourself in trouble. Try to be calm in the present and leave the future to the shoulders of Sri Ramana Bhagawan. You try to elevate my comforts and lift me to the skies. But control is happiness. The construction of a room entirely depends on your choice and economy. If you are so fond of it, then construct it. But do not expect my presence now and then. I entirely depend on Bhagawan's guidance. So, I leave it to the Higher Power. If you construct the room use it as a temple and dedicate it to Bhagawan. You may arrange for *Vedaparayana* [chanting the *Vedas*], for reciting [*Bhagavad*] *Gita* and reading of Bhagawan's teachings on every Sunday. You may also open a small library containing books on Sankara's *advaita* philosophy and Sri Ramana Maharshi's teachings, so that you may get purified yourself to a little extent. My mind seems to be of philosophic bent* whereas yours is that of a householder. So both of us are contrary poles. It being so, both of our views disagree with each other from the very beginning of our lives.[4]

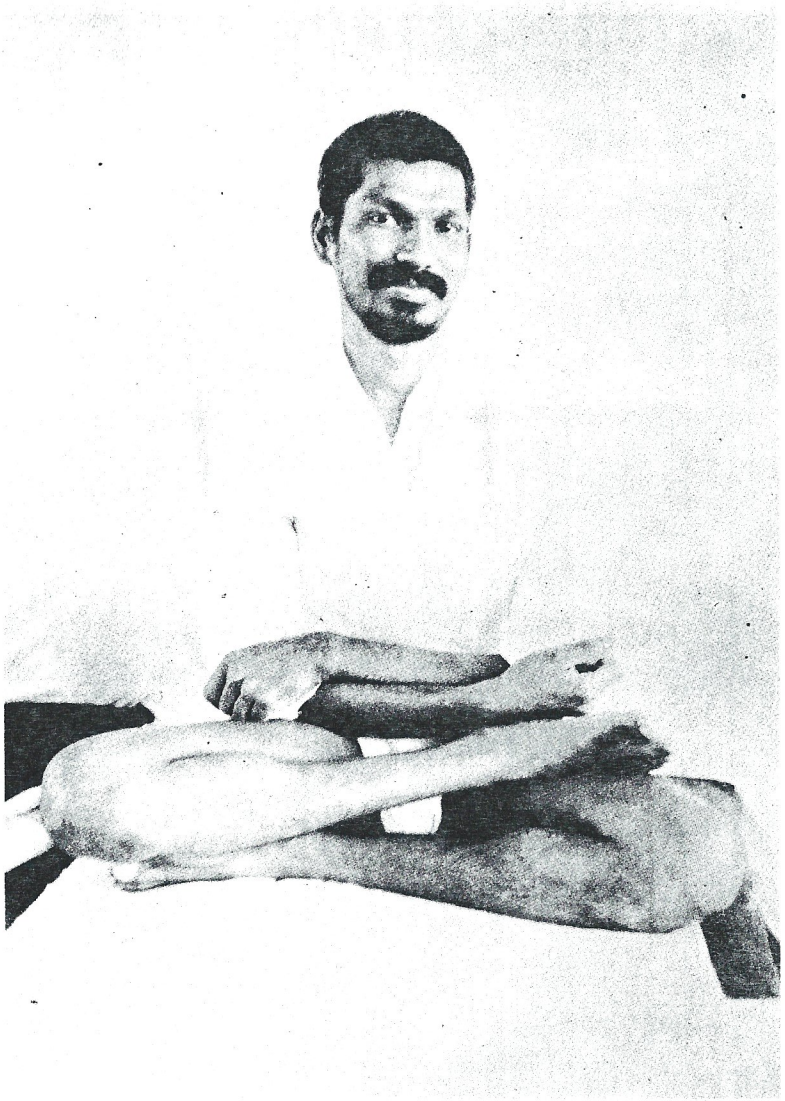
After 2–3 months of sitting on the slopes of Arunachala Sri Lakshmana finally gave in to the requests of his family and the prayers of his devotees in Gudur. He accepted the offer of the land and the new house and returned, somewhat reluctantly, to Gudur. He discovered that the nine-acre plot was quite near the site of his old hut and that the house that was being constructed for him was

* This phrase must be a mistranslation of the original Telugu. Swamy would never have written that his mind was of philosophic bent since he is quite emphatic about not having a mind. The original letter has been lost and the text only survives in this English translation.

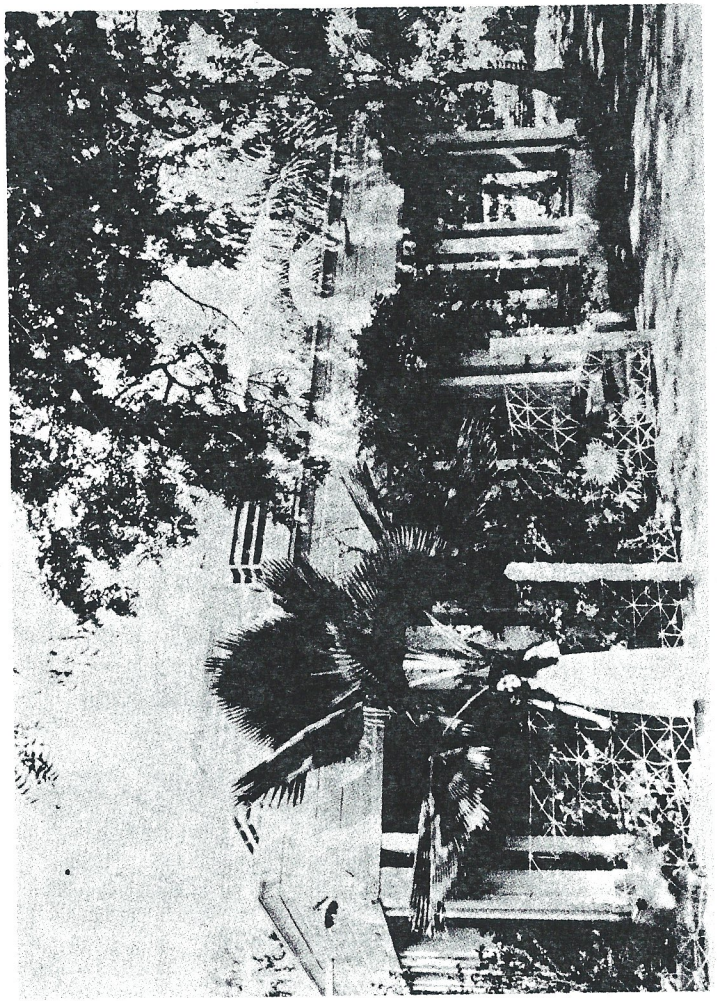
only a few hundred yards away from it. As the new house was still being constructed he moved back into his hut and waited for it to be completed. When it was finished it turned out to be a solid brick and cement house with a flat roof and a wide veranda on three sides. It had one large room and a kitchen on the inside; at the back of the house there was an enclosed courtyard containing a toilet and a space for bathing. There was a small thorn fence around the house but none of the rest of Swamy's newly acquired land was enclosed. He moved into the house in the middle of 1954.

*References:*

[1] *Yogeeswara Sri Lakshmana, a biography*, pp. 18–19.
[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 16–17.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 19.
[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 21–22.



Sri Lakshmana Swamy at the age of 30. The photo was taken during his first public *darshan* in his new house in Chillakur.



The new house that was built for Sri Lakshmana in 1954. This is a recent picture of the house. Mathru Sri Sarada is standing in the foreground.

# 5

# 1954–1972: VISITORS' STORIES

When he returned from Arunachala Sri Lakshmana's lifestyle became a little less severe. He still sat for most of the day in his room, but he was now supplementing his diet with a small cooked meal which his mother brought to him every morning at 9 a.m. He still never went out of his house but he was now more willing to see people. The general public was still only allowed to see him twice a year but he sometimes gave *darshan* to *sadhus* and to other 'special people' on the veranda of his house. When such people came he would open the shutters on one of his windows and give *darshan* to the visitors who would be sitting or standing ouside. In later years he started admitting people into his house, and as the years went by the frequency of his private *darshans* increased. In the 1960s and early 70s Swamy began to be more and more accessible; in addition to seeing more visitors he would often sit in his garden, and for a short period he was even going for walks to a nearby forest.

When Sri Lakshmana moved into his new house he was 29 years old. The previous twelve years of his life, starting from the time when he was attacked in his house by the evil spirit, had been filled with dramatic incidents. Now his life entered a long and fairly uneventful phase. From 1954 to 1972 he lived quietly in his house and garden, coming out twice a year for public *darshans* and occasionally receiving visitors. In 1957 some of his devotees constructed a mandir, or temple, near his house and installed a large portrait of Ramana Maharshi in the place of honour. Swamy now uses this mandir to give public *darshans* and spiritual discourses. In 1958 his mother built herself a hut near Swamy's house. She spent the next 16 years living near Swamy, supplying him with his daily meal and acting as a kind of receptionist for any visitors who wanted to see him. Swamy made no attempt to build up an ashram during this period. Except for one or two huts, no other buildings were constructed for many years; until the mid 1970s nearly all of Swamy's land remained a deserted, unenclosed wilderness.

In 1963 Swamy ended his long period of silence by giving a brief

talk on *Upadesa Saram* to a small group of visitors who came to see him. *Upadesa Saram* is a 30 verse Sanskrit poem which was composed by Ramana Maharshi in the 1920s. It contains a succinct summary of Sri Ramana's views on spiritual practice. It has always been one of Swamy's favourite philosophical works and he frequently quotes from it when he gives his public talks. From 1963 onwards he gave verbal answers to questions his visitors asked, instead of handing them brief cryptic notes or remaining silent. He rarely instigated conversations, but he happily gave out advice if his visitors asked him questions.

Swamy has very high standards when it comes to assessing the spiritual development and potential of visitors and devotees. Very few people impress him with their spiritual worth and even fewer come in the category he calls 'advanced devotees'. One of the few visitors who came into this latter category was a *sadhu* who came to see him in 1956, while he was still not speaking. The *sadhu* had been crippled by polio, the muscles in his legs had atrophied and he could only move around by using his arms and hands. Despite this handicap his face apparently radiated a tangible light and power; everyone who met him was impressed by his saintly aura. He arrived at Gudur by train and asked people on the platform if there were any saints or yogis in the area that he could visit. Everyone recommended Swamy and a local bullock-cart driver gave him a free ride out to Swamy's house. The *sadhu* sat on the veranda and Sri Lakshmana gave him *darshan* through an open window. Swamy saw immediately that he was an advanced devotee and his face lit up with a smile. The two men smiled at each other in silence for a few minutes while Swamy gave him *chakshu diksha*, a process in which the Guru projects the power of the Self into the devotee's mind while he is looking at his eyes. This process often makes the mind subside into the Self and sometimes it even gives the devotee a brief foretaste of the peace and bliss of the Self. The *sadhu* was clearly overjoyed to receive this gift of grace. When Swamy offered two mangoes as a token of his appreciation of the *sadhu's* advanced state, the *sadhu* was so happy that he jumped a little out of his seat (as far as his atrophied legs would allow) and grabbed the mangoes as they were being passed to him. The *sadhu* left soon afterwards and never returned.

Two other *sadhus* came during this period, both of whom had acquired *siddhis* or psychic powers. They came to him separately,



after 1963, when he had begun to speak. The first man came to complain to Swamy that he had lost his power to travel in his astral or subtle body. He told Swamy that previously he had been able to walk through walls in his subtle body and that he could get in and out of anyone's house without using the door. He actually cried in front of Swamy because he had lost this *siddhi* and couldn't get it back. Swamy had no sympathy with him. He told him that it was very good that he had lost this power because such powers were only distractions that prevented one from realising the Self.

The other *sadhu* who visited him had a wider range of *siddhis* and he had used one of them to locate Swamy. He was a well-known guru himself with many followers in the town of Nellore. He had asked his followers to bring him photos of anyone who was reported to be a Guru or a swami because he apparently had the ability to discern from the pictures alone whether such people were spiritually evolved. Out of all the pictures he was shown he selected a picture of Sri Lakshmana and said "This is the man I must go and see". Wearing only a *kaupina* he turned up on Swamy's veranda and told him how he had managed to locate him. He also told him that he had the ability to read anyone's thoughts. Unlike the previous *sadhu* this man had no great opinion of his powers. He admitted that he had not realised the Self and that his powers had not brought him any happiness. Swamy gave him a brief talk in which he explained how the mind must be made to go back into the Self, adding that the mind itself must die there before Self-realisation could happen. The man listened very patiently and then told Swamy, "I have no happiness like you. Your state is very difficult to attain." The man then left and went back to his followers. He returned for a silent *darshan* some time later, but after that Swamy never saw him again. This pattern was to be repeated many times in the next few years. People would come and see Swamy once or twice and then they would disappear and never come back.

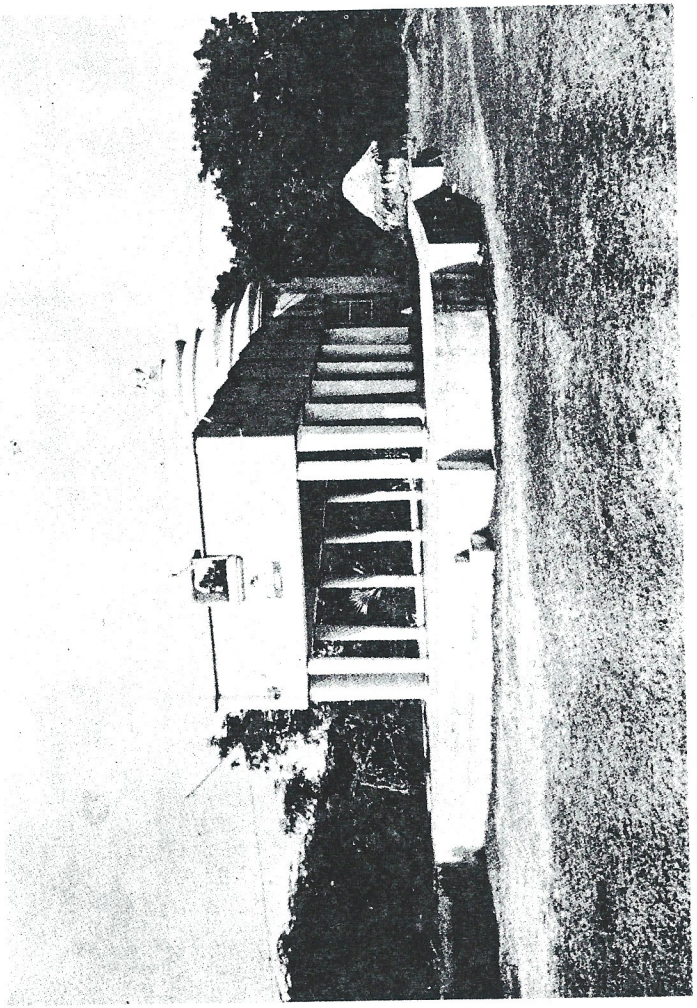
One man who did make frequent visits was a colourful character called Hare Ram. He first came on Sivaratri day in 1955 and made frequent visits thereafter. He was well-known in the area because each year he conducted 300 pilgrims on a tour of the main Himalayan pilgrimage centres such as Rishikesh, Hardwar and Badrinath. He also took the pilgrims to Nepal and to some holy sites in South India. The tour would be made in a privately chartered train and Hare Ram would lead all the pilgrims in *bhajans* (devotional

songs) as the train crossed the Indian countryside. When Swamy started to speak Hare Ram came every year in an attempt to persuade him to join the pilgrimage. He offered him a special private compartment on the train and special accommodation at Swami Sivananda's ashram in Rishikesh. Swamy at first replied, "If it is my destiny to come then I will come; if it is not I will not". Swamy actually had no intention of going and he told me, "I managed to escape from the trip by saying this". Hare Ram never gave up asking and in later years Swamy excused himself on the grounds of ill-health. Despite these constant rebuffs Hare Ram became one of Swamy's devotees. He built a small hut on Swamy's land and visited the ashram regularly, staying about ten days each time. In later years be became crippled when a broken leg failed to heal properly. Even after that he took the pilgrims around India on crutches and he still made his annual appearance at Swamy's door, asking him to come with him. He died in 1982 with his ambition to escort Swamy all round India unfulfilled.

Several of Swamy's visitors during this period had acquired (or lost) *siddhis*; Swamy had never been interested in these phenomena but he seemed to attract people who could display them. One such visitor was a young boy who was accompanied by his mother. The family had a guru in Vijayawada who could materialise objects out of thin air. The young boy had watched his performance very carefully and had suddenly discovered that he had the same power himself. He could make flowers materialise in the palm of his hand, he could make coins appear in his mouth and when he moved his head from side to side, the marks of Lord Venkateswara,* the temple deity of Tirupati, appeared on his forehead. His parents did a little investigation and discovered that flowers were disappearing from nearby flower bushes, but they couldn't explain how the flowers materialised out of nothing in the palm of the boy's hand. The boy's parents suspected that their son had been taken over by a spirit; they withdrew him from school and started praying to God, asking him to take the spirit out of the boy. They eventually consulted a medium who confirmed that the boy had an alien spirit inside him. The medium said that the spirit called himself Venkateswara and

* Three vertical lines, a red one with a white one on either side. Devotees of Lord Venkateswara decorate their foreheads with this pattern.

Sri Lakshmana Swamy in 1960. He was then 35 years old.



The Sri Ramana Gita Mandir which was constructed in Sri Lakshmana's ashram in 1957.



said that he would leave the boy alone if they would take him on a pilgrimage to see Lord Venkateswara in Tirupati. The parents thought that this indicated that the spirit was none other than Lord Venkateswara himself, but when the boy's mother told this theory to Swamy, Swamy rejected it. He told her that Lord Venkateswara was the Self, and that since the Self was everywhere, it couldn't enter or leave anyone in the form of a spirit. When Swamy looked at the boy he could see that he had been taken over by the spirit of a dead man, not a god. He told the boy's mother this and advised her to go ahead with the trip to Tirupati. She took his advice, and when the boy had *darshan* of Lord Venkateswara, the spirit kept his promise and left him. When Swamy gave me the bare outline of this story a few years ago he added the following comments:

> There is nothing spiritual about this [materialising flowers and coins]. The boy was under the control of the spirit of a person who had died. Performing such feats is no indication of a person's spiritual progress, and it has nothing to do with Self-realisation.
>
> A headmaster told me about a similar case. He came across a temple image which actually drank milk which was offered to it. It was not the god who was drinking the milk, it was just some mischievous spirit which had taken up residence in the statue and was causing the milk to disappear.

In the mid 1960s a swami from Kalahasti came to tell Sri Lakshmana about his problems. He turned up in the orange dress of a *sannyasi* and was accompanied by a Hindi pandit. He told Sri Lakshmana that before becoming a swami he had been a family man with a wife, children and a large income from some cultivated land which he owned. He had then become a devotee of a famous Malayali swami who lived in a village called Erpedu, near Tirupati, about 65 miles south-west of Gudur. After visiting this swami for some time he developed an urge to renounce the world and devote himself full-time to spiritual practices. He signed over all his money and possessions to his wife, and with her permission he entered the *sannyasa* state. At first he meditated by himself in a small temple, but when he discovered that he was not making much progress he decided that he would meditate better if he had an ashram and some devotees who could look after him. With the help

of some of his former friends he managed to obtain 60 acres of uncultivated land near Kalahasti.* He also managed to collect enough funds to dig a big well for irrigation and to plant all the land with lemon, mango and orange trees. Unfortunately, looking after his orchard was very time-consuming and he could no longer find any time to meditate; instead he spent all day supervising the work, chasing away goats and collecting and distributing fertilisers. He managed to attract some 'devotees' but they were a very strange bunch of people. He fed them and looked after them but they refused to do any meditation and they refused to help with any of the agricultural work. Finally, they said that they would only continue to be his devotees if he gave each of them five acres of land. The swami, suspecting that they would just sell the land and leave him, refused their demands. When they found out that they couldn't get anything more out of him, his devotees suddenly lost all their devotion and left, leaving him with no followers. The swami told all this to Sri Lakshmana and asked him what he should do. Swamy told him, "Sell the garden, you will probably get at least 2 *lakhs* [200,000 rupees], put the money in the bank and live off the interest. Then you can meditate all day and be happy, without anything to distract you."

"But I can't do that yet, Swamy," the man replied, "the trees are coming on so nicely. In two more years I shall be able to get 1 *lakh* income from them every year."

The swami was clearly too attached to his trees to consider such a simple solution to the problem; Swamy, sensing this, made no further comment.

The Hindi pandit who was accompanying him then approached Swamy with his own problem. The Kalahasti swami had asked him to take *sannyasa* (renounce his family and the world) but he was a married man and he was worried about how his wife would react to such a move. He asked Swamy what he should do. Swamy told him, "Give up *samsara* [worldly life] in the mind and keep your wife and children". This answer pleased the pandit very much; he had no great liking for the idea of becoming a *sannyasi* and he was only considering the idea at all because the Kalahasti swami had told him that it would be spiritually advantageous. Both men then spent the night sleeping on Swamy's veranda and the following morning

* About 45 miles from Gudur.



they returned to Kalahasti. The Hindi pandit, who was pleased with Swamy's advice, came back again for a second *darshan*, but the swami himself never returned. Presumably he was too busy sorting out the problems in his orchard.

It has been mentioned that Swamy sometimes gave *darshan* to visitors who came into the category he calls 'special people'. Venkataratnam, Ramana Maharshi's attendant, was one of these, as was Devaraja Mudaliar, the official diarist of Sri Ramanasramam for the last few years of Sri Ramana's life. When Devaraja Mudaliar first saw him in 1955 he prostrated full-length on the floor and told Swamy that he was very happy to see that a disciple of Ramana Maharshi had achieved such greatness.

Another devotee who managed to see him was a woman from Mangalore (on the west coast of India) who had been directed to Swamy in a dream. She had been visiting Tirupati when the deity of the temple there, Lord Venkateswara, appeared to her in a dream and told her to go and see a great *mahatma* who lived in Chillakur. "Where's that?" she asked. "About 2 miles from Gudur" replied Lord Venkateswara. The woman had not heard of Gudur either but some of her friends knew where it was and they told her how to get there. A few days later, accompanied by several of her friends from Madras, she turned up at Swamy's house. She was apparently very rich and very beautiful but Swamy says that she was also very humble. After talking to her for some time Swamy discovered that she was a relative of Echammal, a woman who used to cook and serve food to Ramana Maharshi for many years. During the *darshan* the woman asked Swamy to look at her palm and tell her what her future would be. Swamy ignored her hand and told her, "Take care of the present and the future will take care of itself. Always think of God." The woman thanked Swamy, ate a meal with her friends in the ashram mandir, and then returned to Madras by car.

Swamy made two unscheduled public appearances during this period, both of them rather unwillingly. The first was when some followers of a man from Chittoor* called Jnanananda Swami insisted that Swamy come to Gudur and give a speech at the opening of an organisation called the Jnana Samaj which the swami himself had founded. Jnanananda Swami's disciples refused to accept Swamy's plea that he didn't want to go; they were so insistent in

* About 120 miles south-west of Gudur.

their demands that Swamy finally said yes just to get rid of them. Soon afterwards Jnanananda Swamy himself arrived in a car, and Swamy, already regretting his decision, was driven off to town. He didn't get very far; when the people of Chillakur saw them driving towards the village they blocked the road and insisted that both of them give *darshan*.

Jnanananda Swami had acquired a certain amount of fame because he could materialise objects out of nothing. He had privately admitted to Swamy that his *siddhis* were of no use to him; he also said that the objects he materialised were brought into existence by evil spirits, not by his own power. However, he never admitted this publicly and the local people wanted his *darshan* just as much as they wanted Swamy's. A little platform was swiftly erected in Chillakur and Swamy had to give a speech before the villagers would allow the car to pass. This unscheduled halt made them late for the meeting. Swamy had to give another talk at the meeting, but when Jnanananda Swami tried to make him president of the newly-formed Jnana Samaj, Swamy put his foot down and refused to entertain the idea. He was mobbed as he was leaving the meeting as nearly everyone there wanted to touch his feet.

The other public appearance occurred when he was invited to be guest of honour at a boy's college and hostel a few miles away. He declined the first invitation but accepted the second. He said that he knew that there was no point in refusing this second invitation because he had forseen that it was his destiny to attend. Before the second invitation arrived he had a brief glimpse into the future and saw himself walking in front of a statue at the hostel. After that he knew that it was useless to resist any more. On the appointed afternoon he was taken to see the hostel, an enormous complex containing a school, a college and residential facilities for over 2,000 boys. It was a very prosperous institution that was partly funded by foreign patrons. Swamy was received with great honour. The buildings and trees had been decorated with fairy-lights and a group of brahmins, chanting the *Vedas*, greeted him as he arrived. He was conducted around the complex and everywhere he went he was garlanded. Swamy was indifferent to all the honours that were being heaped on him; he was only attending the ceremonies because he knew that it was his destiny to attend. His hosts thought that Swamy would be pleased by all the pomp and ceremony, but when they saw that he derived no pleasure from it they were a little dismayed. They carried on with the programme though, and Swamy eventually found himself walking in front of the same statue that he had seen in his brief vision of the future. "The first time I walked in front of the statue, it was like a waking dream," he says. "The second time it happened, at the hostel, I just re-enacted it. So far as I was concerned it had already taken place before I visited the hostel." At the final event of the day Swamy had to give a talk to the boys in the main hall of the hostel. As he sat on the platform the same brahmins were chanting the *Vedas* again, but this time they were simultaneously throwing flowers at him. When it was time for Swamy to speak he recited *Upadesa Saram* in both Sanskrit and Telugu and then selected the following verse for his talk: "Worship of God in his eightfold form, understanding that he is so manifest, is proper worship of him."



Swamy explained in his talk that the eightfold form was the five elements, the sun, the moon and all living beings. He went on to explain that since Iswara, or God, had chosen to manifest as the world and everything in it, one could worship God by having respect and reverence for the world and all the life-forms it contained. Apparently his talk didn't go down very well. He was told afterwards that it was too philosophical and that the boys, who had no grounding in spiritual philosophy, would not have understood most of what he said. The hostel had originally planned to publish Swamy's speech in a magazine, but after hearing its contents they politely ignored it. Swamy didn't care one way or the other. It is one of his characteristics that he never talks down to people; if people cannot understand what he has to say he prefers to remain silent rather than elaborate on or dilute his teachings.

In 1959 a local advocate, who visited Swamy occasionally, lost his only son. The boy, aged four, died after a sudden illness. Full of grief he wrote to Swamy asking him to explain why his son had to die at such an early age. He also wanted to know if the boy's death was inevitable and predetermined, and if so, what possible reason could there be for putting a child on this earth for less than five years. Swamy wrote him a fairly long reply which fortunately has been preserved.

> Death is inevitable to every born individual. Similarly, birth is inevitable to every dead person. Why do you grieve over inevitable happenings? You are saying that he is your child.

Supposing that the child lived for 65 years in his previous life and lived for 5 years in his present life, his span of life would be 70 years in the aggregate. What do you call him? Your father or your child! In the previous life he was the child of one person, in his present life he is your child and in the future life he . . . [will] be the child of another. So it is not desirable to weep for his death under the illusion that he is your child. God has given him and has taken him back. Don't grieve. Think that the whole universe is one family. Every second, millions of people take birth and millions die. If one were to weep for all the dead persons . . . [one] will have to wail ceaselessly for days and nights throughout life. Is it possible?

See! How many difficulties are to be faced with this body. It has to be washed thrice. It has to be fed. It has to be clothed. Its endless desires have to be satisfied. The dead are more happy.

They do not grieve. Will anyone weep . . . [when] he goes to sleep. We are in the three states [waking, dreaming and deep sleep]. We are having the gross inert body in the waking [state], the subtle body in the dream [state], and the cosmic body in *sushupti* [deep sleep]. Is not the one who transcends all these three states and dissolves himself in the Supreme Self really liberated? Is it wisdom to seek permanence of this inert body either to oneself or to others? Think [it] over. At the time of death, the mind forgets the existing body and enters into another body. Whether [you] will it or not what is destined to happen will certainly happen as ordained by God. Hence it is advisable to leave all sorrows to God and live in peace.[1]

An account of the visitors who came to see Swamy during this period would not be complete without a few animal stories. Swamy has the ability to discern the past lives of both animals and human beings and he says that several of the animals that have visited his garden over the years were human beings in their last life. His attitude to reincarnation is similar to the Buddha who said that a human birth gives one a rare opportunity to make spiritual progress; if one wastes it by not meditating then one is likely to be reborn as an animal. Swamy agrees with this. From his observations of the people and animals he has come into contact with over the years he



has discovered that most human beings were animals in their last life and that a small proportion of the animals he sees had human bodies last time around. In recent times Swamy has noted that one of the ashram cows was a woman in her last life and that a dog which lived at the ashram for some time had previously been a teenage boy in Gudur. The boy had died of cancer and had been reborn almost immediately as a dog. Sometimes even good devotees get reborn as animals if there is a chance that they can make progress in such a body; the rat who realised the Self in Swamy's hut is a good example. Another example is a large cobra which has recently been making occasional visits to the ashram. Swamy says that it was a *sadhu* in its last life and he has given instructions that it should not be harmed in any way.

About 20 years ago, in the period covered by this chapter, Swamy's attention was drawn to two rhesus monkeys, one male and one female, which had been human beings in their last births. Rhesus monkeys run wild all over India. They are aggressive, argumentative and never miss a chance to steal food from their human neighbours. While it is possible to get close to them and feed them, they normally get angry and violent if one attempts to touch them. In the mid 1960s Swamy noticed a female rhesus monkey in his garden which had been a woman in its last life. He called to it and it came over to him. Swamy held out his hand and the monkey put one of her hands in it, an unheard of thing for a wild monkey to do. He then invited it into his house and it followed him without showing any fear. Swamy then offered it a banana and it accepted it in a genteel human manner; the usual monkey response to such an offer would be to snatch it, make an aggressive facial gesture and then run away. The monkey even allowed Swamy to take the banana back, another unheard of thing in the monkey world where all food, especially bananas, is ferociously guarded and never surrendered without a fight. A few days later the monkey brought her husband along. He had not been a human being last time; he was afraid to go into the house and he wouldn't go near Swamy. The female monkey was equally at home with other human beings. A few days later Swamy noticed it standing outside his open door while he was giving *darshan* to 10 people inside his house. He called the monkey in to give it some fruit and it walked fearlessly past all the other people in the room on its way to accept the offer.

The other ex-human monkey that Swamy found had fewer human

traits left. Swamy says that it was a 'tricky brahmin' in its last life. It used to delight in stealing fruit from Swamy (who usually cooperated in the thefts), but instead of running away, it would sit down in front of him and slowly eat the stolen fruit with a big grin on its face.

Swamy also came across a cobra that had been a woman in its last life. It approached him one morning while he was walking outside his house. The cobra stopped in front of him, raised its head and looked at Swamy's eyes. Swamy looked back and the two of them gazed at each other for a few seconds. The cobra then lowered its hood and did *pradakshina* of Swamy's house. *Pradakshina* is an act of veneration, found in both Buddhism and Hinduism, in which one walks around an object of worship in a clockwise direction; the worshipped object is always kept to one's right. The cobra returned on the following two days and each time it did a *pradakshina* of Swamy's house. After the third visit he never saw it again.

In the 1960s Swamy used to come out of his house every morning at 11 a.m. and sit on a small concrete platform which had been constructed for him under a neem tree in his garden. By this time there was a fence around his house which was big enough and dense enough to allow him to sit unobserved in his garden. One day, while he was sitting there, he noticed a gold-coloured chameleon lying with its eyes closed a few feet away from him. As he looked at it he discerned that it was an advanced devotee and that it would soon die. Swamy at first thought that it might die without looking at him, but after a few minutes it opened its eyes and gazed in his direction. Swamy says that he thinks that it had probably been watching him from a tree for several days, and that when it knew that it was going to die, it came forward to have a final *darshan*. Swamy gently picked it up and put it in a safe place where it could die in peace. It died about half an hour later. At Swamy's request it was buried near his house and a small *samadhi* shrine was placed over its body.

Shortly after Swamy ended his 13 years of silence three women devotees built a small house on Swamy's land. Swamy's mother moved in with them and the four women lived together for several years. One night their house was burgled while they were all sleeping outside and Swamy suggested that they get a watchdog. A young dog was brought and Swamy saw immediately that it had been a brahmin *pujari* (performer of temple rituals) in its last life. It became



very attached to Swamy and it spent most of its time near his house. Apparently it had been a good devotee in its last life and it had carried this devotion into its current birth as a dog. Swamy reciprocated his affection, often fed him with biscuits, and during one period took him for daily walks. He called him Namdev after the famous Indian saint, but this was eventually shortened to Nama.

Towards the end of the 1960s Swamy developed problems with his digestion. A doctor whom he consulted attributed it to poor diet and lack of exercise. He recommended that Swamy go for a long walk every day. Swamy, now less concerned about staying away from the public, accepted the advice and took Nama for a daily walk to a small forest about a mile away. It was the first time that Swamy had moved freely in the local area since his return to Gudur in 1950. The local people in Chillakur were shocked. In their view yogis should meditate all day and not go out for walks with a dog. They decided that Swamy had fallen from his high state and they started to turn against him. His popularity and reputation plummetted as the locals spread malicious rumours about him; one rumour even suggested that he went to the forest every day for a secret assignation with a woman. The villagers' malevolence didn't stop at rumour and gossip, they actually started a campaign of physical harassment. When Swamy went for his walk he used to sit on a sandy patch in the forest. One day he looked at his usual seat and knew intuitively that it had been booby-trapped in some way. He selected a different spot and sat down. Nama, meanwhile, had gone to the original sandy patch and had started to do some digging. Swamy noticed that thorn twigs had been buried just below the surface of the sand; had he sat down there he would have impaled himself on the thorns. The local shepherds joined in the campaign against him and they used to deliberately drive their flocks of sheep and goats at Swamy in an attempt to impede his progress. Nama usually came to his rescue by chasing the animals away. The shepherds pretended to be very indignant about this and threatened to kill his dog if he didn't keep it under control.

Not all the people he met on his walks thought badly of him—some of his Gudur devotees came to have his *darshan* while he was in the forest—but his walks were interrupted so many times by ill-mannered and ill-intentioned people that after one year he gave them up. From that time on he restricted himself to walks inside his garden.

Nama proved to be useful in other ways: at night he used to guard any valuables that had been left outside by sleeping next to them. When Swamy was having a new well dug in his garden Nama slept every night next to the tools which the workmen had left; he knew intuitively, without being told, that they were valuable. He took his guard-dog duties very seriously and once had a half-hour fight with a cobra which he was trying to chase away from Swamy's veranda. When a devotee, fearing for his safety, pulled him out of the fight and tried to carry him away, Nama jumped out of his arms and carried on with the battle. On another occasion he chased away one of the villagers from Chillakur who had come to the ashram to see Swamy. It transpired that this particular man had been spreading malicious stories about Swamy. He came to the ashram with a great show of mock-piety in an attempt to have *darshan*, but Nama sensed his underlying ill-will and wouldn't let him anywhere near Swamy's house.

Nama served Swamy for about 12 years. Towards the end of his life he used to disappear for several days at a time, possibly because the women who were supposed to be feeding him were not giving him his food regularly. He finally passed away in Swamy's mother's house around 1977.

*References*:

[1] *Yogeeswara Sri Lakshmana, a biography*, pp. 55–56.

# 6

# SRI LAKSHMANA ASHRAM

In 1972 Sri Lakshmana abandoned his practice of only giving *darshan* twice a year. He had been giving spiritual talks in his house for some time, and when a few devotees suggested that he give talks to the general public at regular intervals, Swamy agreed. He announced that in future he would be giving *darshan* to the public every week in the Ramana Mandir that his devotees had constructed for him in 1957.

The shrine of this mandir is circular, but with no front wall. In front of it, and joined to it, is a *mantapam** which can accommodate about 120 people. Each Sunday Swamy sat in the shrine on a small low table and gave *darshan* to the devotees who sat facing him in the mandir. After a few years he gave up sitting on the table and gave *darshan* instead from a large upholstered chair which had been provided for him by Sri B. Ramanadham, one of his boyhood friends.

Swamy also gave *darshan* on major Hindu festival days and on the anniversaries of the birthday and death day of Sri Ramana Maharshi. Initially, all the *darshans* were quite long, sometimes lasting as much as three hours, but in recent years they have been shortened to about 45 minutes. Nowadays, a *puja* is performed at each *darshan*, sometimes *bhajans* are sung, and quite often Swamy gives a speech.

These speeches are primarily designed to encourage a spiritual way of life among the general public; more often than not they are an entertaining mixture of philosophy, comic stories and moral homilies. They usually begin with a Sanskrit quotation and a little lecture on philosophy or Ramana Maharshi's teachings, but after a few minutes Swamy starts to interject a few humorous stories and parables. In most of his talks Swamy gently upbraids his listeners for their lack of devotion, their worldliness and their inability to control their minds and senses, but instead of doing this directly, he usually tells a series of funny stories which drive the point home

* A hall with a roof, but no walls, supported by pillars.

in an entertaining way. Swamy is a consummate story teller and he frequently enlivens his narratives by taking on the roles of the various characters in whatever story he is telling. The stories themselves may not be very funny or profound but in Swamy's adept hands they always produce gales of laughter. Swamy often joins in the laughter himself; sometimes he laughs so hard that tears form in the corners of his eyes.

Swamy never plans his speeches in advance. As he sits before his audience he automatically senses the problems and needs of the people who have come to see him. During the course of his talk he will often talk about these problems and give out advice which is meant for individual members of the audience. It is always done in a very impersonal way; no names are ever mentioned and it is up to the listener to decide whether or not any particular piece of advice is meant for him. It is fascinating to see how Swamy tailors his advice to meet the needs or predilections of his individual listeners. Last year, for example, a man came to listen to Swamy for the first time. He was, or had been, the president of the Gudur communist party and the leader of an atheist group which campaigned strongly against temple and idol worship. Shortly before he came to the ashram he underwent a conversion; he started to believe in God, but not in the merits of temple worship, and he began to memorise verses from the *Bhagavad Gita*. Swamy knew nothing about this when he came to the mandir to give *darshan*, but with his usual perception he discerned the man's character and made some remarks which seemed to be specifically designed for the man's state of mind. He started by quoting some verses from the *Bhagavad Gita* on the need to control the mind, and then went on to outline a few ways in which this might be achieved. Swamy then talked a little about finding God in the Heart, instead of in idols and temples, and added that once one has found God in the Heart one also discovers that he is everywhere. In the course of his talk he quoted the famous verse about the body being the temple, with the God inside it being the Self or *Atman* in the Heart. He concluded this portion of his speech by saying that this *Atman* was the real God and that all worship should be directed towards it.

As the 1970s progressed Swamy began to see more and more people in his house. By the end of the decade he was giving *darshan* virtually every day to small groups of people. He also began to give an extra public *darshan* on Wednesday afternoon on the veranda



of his house. An ashram started to grow up around him as more and more people came into personal contact with him. The ashram had to start from scratch; Swamy had neglected his land so much in the previous 20 years that about 2 acres of it had been taken over by squatters from the local village. Even today, not all of Swamy's land has been enclosed. The piece which is now fenced in, on which the ashram has been built, probably represents about two-thirds of the land which was given to him in 1954.

As late as 1975 there were no facilities at all for resident devotees, but over the next ten years a small ashram slowly came into being. In addition to Swamy's house and the Ramana Mandir there is now a guest house, a bookstore, a cowshed, a large dining room (which also doubles as a guest house), three huts which house resident devotees, and a Dakshinamurti shrine. There is now a limited amount of accommodation available for both visitors and full-time residents, but most of the devotees who see Swamy regularly still continue to live in Gudur.

The ashram is now enclosed by a continuous line of thorn trees. These trees are the most prominent weeds of South India; they take over nearly every available patch of empty land because they are inedible, fast growing and drought-resistant. The area around the ashram is full of them, and even inside the ashram they continue to thrive on about half of the land. So far as vegetation is concerned the ashram is still a bit of a wilderness. The climatic conditions for most of the year are semi-arid and only thorn trees and palmyra trees seem to flourish unaided. Swamy used to have a big agricultural well in his garden, and for a while an attempt was made to grow fruit trees in the ashram. Unfortunately, the well caved in and all the young trees died. The whole of the ashram now depends on a 6-feet-diameter well which is located next to Swamy's house.

In 1974 Sarada, the girl Swamy had been waiting so many years for, finally appeared. She moved into the ashram the following year and she has lived there ever since. Her arrival constituted a major landmark in Swamy's life, but it will not be necessary to give an account of it in this chapter since the whole of part three of this book is devoted to the years that she has spent in the ashram. Only one effect of her arrival needs to be noted here. While she was doing her *sadhana* at the ashram (1975–78) Swamy allowed visitors and devotees to be with him for several hours every day. This was the high point of his accessibility. Since then he has slowly reduced

the amount of time he spends with devotees. From the middle of the 1970s till 1983 Sri Lakshmana gave *darshan* every day to everyone who was staying in the ashram. Since that time Mathru Sri Sarada has been playing a greater role in teaching the resident and visiting devotees and Swamy has been curtailing the amount of time he spends with them. Nowadays, except on special occasions, Swamy only sees devotees twice a week.

He explains this reclusiveness by saying that there are very few people who are spiritually mature enough to benefit from the type of teaching which he offers. He sometimes says that he is always happy to see good devotees, by which he means people who are mentally pure and humble, and he often adds that should such devotees come he would be happy to spend time with them. Sarada's spiritual career illustrates this very well. Prior to her arrival Sri Lakshmana only saw devotees once a week, but when he saw Sarada and realised what an advanced devotee she was, he adopted her as his daughter and gave her unlimited access to him. I have heard him say that he would be willing to do the same for any other equally advanced devotee. It has already been remarked that Swamy's standards are very high; if advanced devotees fail to appear he will probably continue to live a reclusive life. He apparently does not consider it worthwhile to spend a large amount of time with immature devotees since they cannot derive much benefit from the spiritual power that he transmits.

This 'spiritual power' needs a few words of explanation. There is a power which radiates from (or operates in the vicinity of) those who have realised the Self. Its effect can be experienced: in the presence of a Guru who has realised the Self, devotees' minds automatically quieten down. This power is transmitted quite spontaneously and effortlessly by the Guru; it is one of the automatic consequences of realisation. The effect it produces is proportional to the spiritual maturity of the devotee; immature devotees may feel nothing at all when they are exposed to this power whereas the mind of an advanced devotee may quieten down completely and subside into the Self. The transmission of this power, which Sri Lakshmana calls the grace of the Self, is the most direct form of spiritual teaching; instead of giving instructions on how to control the mind, the Guru effortlessly emits a power which automatically controls the minds of people around him.

The strength of the transmission can be controlled by the Guru.



If a disciple makes an effort to control his mind, or fills it with love for God or the Guru, then the flow of grace from the Guru will be stronger. The following quotation makes this clear:

> *Question*: Does the grace of the Guru flow automatically or does the Guru exercise some control over who receives it and who does not?
> *Swamy*: Grace is always flowing from the form of the Guru. If your mind is quiet you will automatically receive it. But if a Guru sees that a particular devotee is full of devotion or free from thoughts, he may respond to the devotee's state of mind by increasing the flow of grace towards him. So you can say that grace is always flowing, but that sometimes the flow is increased because the Guru is deliberately projecting it.

This transmission of power forms the core of Sri Lakshmana's teachings. When devotees sit with him during a formal *darshan*, he will look at each devotee in turn, see what state each of their minds is in, and then transmit this power of the Self to all those he feels can be benefited by it. This transmission of grace usually takes place while he is looking at the devotee's eyes. Swamy sometimes calls this process *chakshu diksha*, which means giving power or initiation through the eyes. Ramana Maharshi also used this method to bring his own devotees to a state of inner silence. In *Guru Vachaka Kovai* Sri Ramana says,

> The Guru is the bestower of silence who reveals the light of Self-knowledge which shines as the residual reality. Spoken words are of no use whatsoever if the eyes of the Guru meet the eyes of the disciple.[1]

Ramana Maharshi called this method 'teaching through silence' and he too regarded it as the most important part of his teachings. There are numerous accounts in print of devotees and visitors who sat with Sri Ramana and experienced states of peace, bliss or inner stillness because of the power that he was transmitting. Devotees at Sri Lakshmana Ashram experience the same states while they are sitting with Swamy.

In addition to producing a state of temporary quietness, the power which the Guru transmits cleans and purifies the mind. When

the mind becomes pure, that is, free from thoughts and out-going tendencies, it is more easy for it to sink into the Heart and experience the bliss of the Self. The purifying power of the Guru's grace cannot be overstressed. I have heard Sri Lakshmana say that a single glance from a Guru can be more spiritually beneficial than many years of solitary meditation. Again, Ramana Maharshi was of the same opinion. A verse which he included in one of his rare written works extols the purifying power of the *jnani's* look:

> Sacred bathing places, which are composed of water, and images of deities, which are made of stone and earth, cannot be comparable to those great souls [*mahatmas*]. . . . The bathing places and deities bestow purity of mind after countless days, whereas such purity is instantly bestowed upon people as soon as *sadhus* [those who have realised the *Self*] see them with their eyes.[2]

Association with the Guru is thus considered by Sri Lakshmana to be of paramount importance for those who are seeking Self-realisation. This association, or *sat-sanga*, need not necessarily be physical; Swamy says that if one meditates on the name and form of the Guru then the grace will also flow into the devotee's mind. He stresses the importance of the Guru's grace so strongly in his teachings that he insists that, except in very rare instances, Self-realisation is impossible without it.

All these facets of Sri Lakshmana's teachings (the role of the Guru, his grace, and the efforts the disciple must make to receive it) will be explored in greater detail in the following two chapters.

The pre-eminence which Sri Lakshmana attaches to his silent teachings partly accounts for his habit of talking very little to devotees. Talking is an inferior way of transmitting the teachings and it often obstructs the power which is flowing from the Guru. Sri Ramana Maharshi explains how this happens in the following passage. It should be noted that when Sri Ramana uses the word 'silence' in this quotation he means the silent power that is emitted by the Guru.

> Silence is ever-speaking. It is a perenial flow of language which is interrupted by speaking. These words I am speaking obstruct that mute language. For example, there is electricity flowing in a wire. With resistance to its passage it glows as a lamp or revolves as a fan. In the wire it remains as electric energy. Similarly, silence is the eternal flow of language, obstructed by words.
>
> What one fails to know by conversations extending to several years can be known instantly in silence, or in front of silence—Dakshinamurti and his four disciples are a good example of this. This is the highest and most effective language.



Dakshinamurti is a manifestation of Siva and he is generally acknowledged to be the spiritual ancestor of all other Gurus. The traditional story about him tells how he brought four sages to an experience of the Self through transmitting his grace in silence. In modern times both Ramana Maharshi and Lakshmana Swamy have adopted this technique as their principal method of teaching.

Sri Lakshmana does occasionally talk to devotees and answers their questions, but he rarely instigates conversations with them. When he gives private *darshans* in his house, or on his veranda, he will sometimes give a brief talk at the end of a period of silent *darshan*. The subject matter rarely changes: sometimes he will discern what a devotee's main problems are and talk about them, but usually he will outline the role that the Guru and the devotee's effort play in the process of Self-realisation. More rarely, he will reminisce about events from his past, and sometimes, especially if new devotees are present, he will talk about how Sarada came to him, completely surrendered, and realised the Self. Swamy often gives private *darshans* to new devotees, or to visitors who are only staying for a few days; on such occasions he will often give a talk and answer any of the questions that the visitors might have. Most of the conversations that are printed in the following two chapters took place under these circumstances.

The remainder of the conversations took place while Swamy was staying at Arunachala. In the last few years he has been visiting the mountain almost every year, accompanied by Saradamma and a small group of their devotees from Gudur. They all stay in the guest houses at Sri Ramanasramam, usually for a period of one or two weeks. Swamy particularly likes to visit Arunachala at *Deepam*, a festival which celebrates the occasion when Siva first appeared there as a mountain. During his time at Arunachala he gives *darshan* every day and many of the residents of Sri Ramanasramam and the

surrounding area attend. Many of the people who have not seen Swamy before are not content to sit in silence and Swamy often finds himself engaged in lengthy spiritual and philosophical conversations.

In addition to these formal *darshan* sessions Swamy allows devotees to accompany him on his trips on and around the hill. Many years ago he fell out of a tree and damaged his hip in such a way that he now finds it difficult to walk more than 2 miles or climb very easily. Despite this injury he walks on the lower slopes of Arunachala every day and he cycles around the hill about every third day. On his cycle *pradakshinas* he often stops to sit and look at the hill, and he nearly always stops at the main temple at Adiannamalai, about half-way round the mountain. When he walks on the hill itself he usually stops and gives *darshan*, sitting on a rock, near the path which leads to Skandashram, the original ashram of Sri Ramana Maharshi. Alternatively, he will walk at the foot of the hill to a clearing in a forest about a mile from Sri Ramanasramam.

He resumed his visits to Arunachala in 1967 when he went to attend the *kumbhabhishekam* (consecration ceremony) of the shrine that had been erected over the physical remains of Sri Ramana Maharshi. Since then he has been making a pilgrimage there almost every year.

On his trip there in 1967 to attend the *kumbhabhishekam* ceremony, Swamy was unable to get any accommodation at Sri Ramanasramam because all the rooms were occupied. He sought out Raja Iyer, the postmaster who had found him a house in 1949, and Raja Iyer kindly gave him the keys to the ashram Post Office, a small room located next to the ashram's cow-shed. Swamy slept in the Post Office while his mother, who had accompanied him, had to sleep in a *mantapam* outside the ashram gates because women are not allowed to sleep in the main ashram compound.

When Swamy went to see the new shrine that had been built he found that his (and everyone else's) front view of the *lingam* over Sri Ramana's body was obscured by a giant Nandi. On the second night of his stay there he had a dream in which Ramana Maharshi appeared to him. The giant Nandi also appeared in the dream, obscuring his view of Sri Ramana. Ramana Maharshi asked him to remove it, but Swamy replied that he couldn't do it because it was far too heavy. Sri Ramana then put one finger under the statue, lifted it on the end of his finger, and threw it away. Swamy told no



one about this, but on his next visit to the ashram he noticed that the large Nandi had been replaced by one which was less than a foot high.

Swamy's trips to Arunachala are the only occasions when he moves freely with his devotees for long periods. While he is there it is usually possible to spend several hours each day with him. Both Swamy and Saradamma regard their pilgrimage to Arunachala as one of the highlights of their year. Except for occasional visits to the doctor, Swamy's trips to Arunachala are the only occasions when he leaves his ashram.

Swamy is now moving inexorably towards old age; last year (1985) his devotees celebrated his 60th birthday at a large function in the ashram that was attended by several hundred people. Sri Lakshmana has never looked after his body very well and the neglect of past years is catching up with him. His face is still unlined but his body is far from strong. For many years he was afflicted by chronic digestive problems, and more recently back and hip pains have restricted his movements a little. Swamy tends to ignore all but the most debilitating complaints; he rarely cancels *darshans*, and even when he is in pain no sign of it ever appears on his face.

He continues to stay in the body only because he feels that he can be useful to good devotees who want to progress along the spiritual path. He says:

> The *jnani* has no desires at all. There is nothing in this world that he needs; he doesn't even need a body. Even though a *jnani* knows that he doesn't need a body, he will often stay in the body to help devotees to realise the Self. If he gives up the body he cannot perform this function. There is no other reason for him to stay alive.
>
> All people benefit from being in the company of a *jnani*. Immoral people give up their bad behaviour, ordinary people become devotees, good devotees find their devotion increasing and those who are ripe for realisation realise the Self.

*References* :

[1] *Guru Vachaka Kovai*, verse 286.

[2] *Ulladu Narpadu Anubandham*, verse 5.

[3] *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, pp. 200–201.

# PART TWO

## Sri Lakshmana Swamy: Teachings

# 7
# THE GURU

Sri Lakshmana's teachings have only one purpose: to direct devotees towards realisation of the Self. Because of this he rarely talks about philosophical or theoretical matters. When he talks about the Self, and explains how realisation can be brought about, he always stresses that the grace of the Self is more important than any amount of effort that the devotee might make. He says that the mind, or the individual self, cannot eliminate itself through its own efforts, all it can do is move a certain distance towards the Self. When the mind has trained itself to subside a little into the Heart, the Self starts to pull it into itself. If the devotee is sufficiently advanced, the Self will pull the mind completely into the Heart and destroy it. This is the moment of Self-realisation.

> *Swamy*: For realisation effort is needed, but grace is also required, and grace is more important. The mind can move towards the Self, but it cannot reach it. Ramana Maharshi used the analogy of a candle and the sun. The candle is the mind and its light cannot be compared to the light of the sun, which is the Self. If a candle travels towards the sun, the heat of the sun will melt it before it gets anywhere near it. So it is with the mind; the mind cannot reach the Self, but if it makes the attempt, the Self will destroy it.

The key figure in this process is the Guru. Sri Lakshmana maintains that it is the Guru who provides the necessary grace to make the devotee's mind subside into the Self; he also says that it is the Guru who finally destroys it there. A few years ago I was talking to him about a famous spiritual figure when he remarked, "If he can use the power of the Self to bring a devotee to Self-realisation, then one may accept him as a genuine Guru. This is the ultimate test." This brief remark succinctly summarises, in Sri Lakshmana's view, the qualifications a Guru must have and the role he plays in the devotee's life.

Sri Lakshmana further insists that only a living human Guru has enough power to bring a devotee to Self-realisation. Some-

times he will admit that in very rare instances the unmanifest Self may bring about Self-realisation, but he will usually add that this can only happen with devotees who have virtually completed their *sadhana* in previous lives.

> *Swamy*: A living human Guru is essential for Self-realisation. It is the Self, acting through the medium of the Guru, which finally destroys the ego, and only the human Guru can act as the medium. When the Guru gives up his body, the Self can no longer use him to destroy devotees' egos.
> *Question*: Ramana Maharshi realised the Self without any effort and without a Guru. How was this possible?
> *Swamy*: He was a very advanced soul who had almost completed his *sadhana* in his previous lives.
> *Question*: If the Guru cannot provide help after his death, what is the devotee to do when the Guru gives up the body?
> *Swamy*: If the devotee wants to realise the Self he should try to find another Guru who has realised the Self. Otherwise it will be extremely difficult.

Before elaborating on this rather contentious theme it will be instructive to read a brief exchange which took place between Ramana Maharshi and Yogi Ramaiah, one of his most respected devotees. The conversation took place in the late 1940s.

> *Question*: Some devotees of [Shirdi] Sai Baba* worship a picture of him and say that it is their Guru. How could that be? They can worship it as God, but what benefit could they get by worshipping it as their Guru?
> *Ramana Maharshi*: They secure concentration by that. . . .
> *Question*: How can a lifeless picture help in developing deep concentration? It requires a living Guru who could show it in practice. It is possible for Bhagavan to attain perfection without a living Guru, but is it possible for people like myself?
> *Ramana Maharshi*: That is true. Even so, by worshipping a lifeless portrait, the mind gets concentrated to a certain extent. That concentration will not remain constant unless one knows one's own Self by enquiring. For that enquiry, a Guru's help is necessary.[1]

* A Guru who died in 1918.



Sri Ramana's second answer contains three interesting points:

1) Devotion to an image of a dead Guru is good for concentrating the mind, but no more.
2) To know the Self, self-enquiry is required.
3) A Guru's help is required to do self-enquiry properly. Since Sri Ramana has already stated in both answers that devotion to a dead Guru is only good for enhancing one's ability to concentrate, one must assume that when he says "a Guru's help is necessary" he means a living Guru. This inference is substantiated by another part of the answer. When Yogi Ramaiah says, "It requires a living Guru who could show it in practice", Sri Ramana replies "That is true".

Sri Lakshmana endorses all of these three points and frequently mentions them in his talks. Of the three items, he attaches most importance to the necessity of having a living Guru. He talks about this so frequently that it is legitimate to regard it as the central idea of his teachings.

Many of his questioners challenge his assertion that dead Gurus cannot bring one to a realisation of the Self. Because of this it will be helpful to explain the reasoning behind his statements. The Guru, according to Sri Lakshmana, is not a person, he is the impersonal Self; he is the power of the Self manifesting through a human body, not the body itself or anything in it. While that body is alive the grace of the Self is channelled through it to devotees. When the body dies the Self can no longer use it to transmit grace. After death the Guru remains as he always was, that is, the unmanifest and formless Self. Because the Guru has no form after the death of the physical body, it is not then possible for a devotee to get his grace by concentrating on a picture or a mental image of him. This is because the 'him' no longer exists. As Sri Ramana says, such practices are only good for concentration.

If one concentrates on, and has devotion towards, a dead Guru, then grace will come from the unmanifest Self, and not from the form of the Guru. Sri Lakshmana says that this grace can take one to an effortless thought-free state, but it cannot pull the mind into the Self and destroy it. He maintains that only the living Guru can do this.

Some people would argue that the Guru (by which they usually mean his form and the knowledge and power he has) still exists in some way after his death, and that it is therefore possible for him to

transmit grace to devotees who are still alive. Sri Lakshmana denies that this is true or possible. He says that it is the mind or the 'I'-thought that takes on a new form after death, and that if the 'I'-thought has ceased to exist prior to physical death (as is the case in Self-realised Gurus), then the Guru cannot assume any new form, or continue to exist in any perceptible or contactable way, once the body has died. At the moment of the Guru's physical death any form, power, knowledge and memories that he might appear to have had during his life all cease to exist.

S.S. Cohen once asked Sri Ramana about the after-death state of a *jnani*. When he asked Sri Ramana whether a *jnani* could continue to exist on subtler planes of existence after his death, Sri Ramana replied that he could not. Then S.S. Cohen mentioned that a famous philosopher postulated that *jnanis* have a body of light after they die. Sri Ramana replied that *jnanis* take on no new form or body after they die because "taking another body means throwing a veil, however subtle, on reality". He then added that taking another body is "bondage" whereas "Liberation is absolute and irrevocable".[2] This is also Sri Lakshmana's point of view.

Students and devotees of Sri Ramana will note that there are many other similarities between Ramana Maharshi's teachings and Sri Lakshmana's. This should not be taken to mean that Swamy's teachings are an interpretation of, or a commentary on, Sri Ramana's. This is only true in the few cases where he cites something that Sri Ramana did or said. Swamy's teachings on the Self are derived from his own Self-realisation, and not from anything he has heard or read.

In the conversations that follow, Swamy talks about various aspects of the Guru and his power. I have included a number of conversations and comments which seem to be about *jnanis* rather than Gurus. I have done this because Swamy, in his role as a Guru, often talks about himself in the third person as 'the *jnani*'. For example, instead of saying, "When I look at a devotee's mind" he will say, "When the *jnani* looks at the devotee's mind". I have included many comments of this type because they shed valuable light on the way that Sri Lakshmana functions as a Guru. In all the conversations the devotee's remarks or questions are preceded by the word '*Question*:', while Swamy's answers always begin with the word '*Swamy*:'. In this chapter, and in all subsequent chapters that contain the teachings of Lakshmana Swamy or Mathru Sri Sarada, a



horizontal line indicates that one conversation or talk has ended, and that another, spoken on a different occasion, is about to begin.

The remainder of this chapter is taken up with talks and conversations except for two explanatory notes which introduce new aspects of Swamy's teachings. Both of these have been printed in italics to distinguish them from the main body of the text.

*Question*: What is the role of the Guru?
*Swamy*: The Guru is the Self in the Heart of each devotee. When the devotee makes an effort to be without thoughts or to surrender to the Self, the Guru within responds. He watches the efforts made by the devotee and transmits the grace of the Self. This grace purifies the devotee's mind and pulls it towards the Self. Eventually, if the devotee is ripe, the Self pulls the mind into the Heart and destroys it.
*Question*: You say that a Guru is essential. Does that mean that one has to be physically near him, or does his grace operate at a distance?
*Swamy*: There is no question of distance for the Self. You are never away from the grace of the Self. On the other hand, it is good to be in the presence of a Guru because grace is channelled through the form of the Guru. If the Self is everywhere, why did people flock to see Ramana Maharshi during his lifetime? It was because he was channelling the grace of the Self to the people in his physical proximity. The grace of the Self flows from the physical form of the Guru. In his presence devotee's minds are automatically quietened.
*Question*: You recommend concentration on the name and form of an enlightened one. Can one concentrate on one of the gods, such as Rama or Krishna, instead?
*Swamy*: If you concentrate on the name and form of a god, the Self may take the form of that god and appear before you. These gods are not apart from the Self, and if you concentrate on them, the grace of the Self will start to flow.
*Question*: So a physical Guru is not absolutely necessary?
*Swamy*: You may make good progress by concentrating on a god, but in the final stages of *sadhana* [spiritual effort] a human Guru is essential.

Just before Sarada realised the Self her 'I'-thought tried to escape by breaking her skull. If I had not been present the experience

would have killed her. The 'I'-thought would have broken her skull and escaped to the higher regions where it would have been reborn again.

So, a human Guru is essential. In my own case I was able to obtain a brief experience of the Self by my own effort, but I was unable to make it permanent. I knew I needed a Guru. I came to Ramana Maharshi and by his grace I realised the Self.

*Question*: But Ramana Maharshi had no Guru.

*Swamy*: In very rare cases the Self within acts as the Guru, but in all other cases a Guru is essential.

*Question*: If one does not have a Guru, how far can one progress through individual effort?

*Swamy*: If you make an effort the inner Guru will help you to make progress, but it is very difficult to realise the Self by the inner Guru alone. Trying to reach the Self by your own efforts is like digging a well to get a drink of water. If you have a Guru, the well is already dug and you can draw water from it at any time.

*Question*: What if the Guru is no longer in the body? My Guru died many years ago. Can I realise the Self by concentrating on him?

*Swamy*: If a Guru gives a devotee a direct experience of the Self while he is alive, then it may be possible for the devotee to realise the Self after his death. If not, it will be very difficult.

---

*Swamy*: The Self or the Guru is an infinite ocean of grace. Ramana Maharshi has said that if you approach this ocean with a cup you can only take away a cupful; if you come with a bucket you can only take away a bucketful. The amount of grace which one receives is proportional to the degree to which one surrenders. If you surrender completely, then you will receive enough grace to realise the Self.

When the Guru looks into a devotee's eyes he is looking into the devotee's mind to see how far it is humbling and surrendering itself to the Self. If the Guru sees that the devotee's mind is quiet and humble then the grace will automatically flow.

Many devotees ask, "Why can't you give us all the infinite grace of the Self and give us all Self-realisation?" This is not possible because the minds of such people are not pure or humble enough. If a Guru gives a large amount of grace to such people the shock



will kill them. Imagine a car going at top speed. If the car suddenly hits an obstacle and stops, the occupants will all be killed. The mind is like a car; to stop it suddenly is dangerous. Meditation applies the brakes to the mind. Unless he has purified and slowed his mind by meditation, the devotee cannot safely receive the full force of the Guru's grace.

There is another problem. Although the grace and power of the Self are infinite, the Guru must use his body to transmit this power. The body could not stand the strain of giving so much grace to many people in such a short time. The body would weaken and die within a very short period. Instead of weakening his body by wasting his power on all the immature devotees who come to see him, the Guru saves his power and his health by only transmitting large amounts of grace to the good devotees who deserve it. If the devotee's mind is ready, the grace will automatically start to flow.

Ramana Maharshi used to give *darshan* to hundreds of people every day, but most of these people only received a brief glance or a smile. He was not transmitting power to most of these people. When he was once asked if he would tour India and give *darshan* to all the thousands of devotees who could not come to Tiruvannamalai, he replied, "I cannot give *darshan* to everyone". I don't know what he meant by this. He may have been saying that it was physically impossible for him to meet all the thousands of people who wanted to see him, but he may also have been implying that it would have been too much of a strain on his body to give so much power and grace in such a short time.

---

*Question*: Is it possible to know one's past lives?

*Swamy*: This is a *siddhi* [power] which you can acquire by intense meditation and concentration. But it is not something that is worth striving for because it will not help you to realise the Self.

The power to see previous lives often comes automatically to a *jnani*, along with many other powers. For example, a *jnani* may be able to look at a devotee and tell immediately if that person is capable of realising the Self in his present life or not. But the *jnani* will rarely disclose such information because it will only cause quarrels and jealousies among devotees.

*Question*: How does the *jnani* evaluate spiritual potential?

*Swamy*: The body and the mind are formed from the thoughts of

the previous life. The *jnani* looks at your past life, sees how it has affected your current life and notes how pure and humble your mind is. With this information he can easily see if you are capable of realising the Self or not. When I first saw Sarada I saw immediately that she was a very ripe devotee who could easily realise the Self, so I adopted her as my daughter. Within four years she realised the Self.

*Question*: If the *jnani* has so much power why can't he take a new body when he dies in order to help successive generations of devotees? Why must the birth in which he realises the Self be his last birth?

*Swamy*: It is the mind which takes birth in a new body. The *jnani* has no mind, so there is no question of rebirth for him.

*Question*: Some Gurus say that after they die they will take a subtle body in one of the astral worlds.

*Swamy*: To take a body, even a subtle body in the higher regions, an 'I' is necessary. When the 'I' is still present rebirth is inevitable. When the 'I' has died, rebirth is impossible.

*Question*: But why can't a *jnani* choose to be reborn? He makes choices while he is alive, so there must be some mental faculty in him which he can use to bring about a rebirth.

*Swamy*: The *jnani* has no mind at all. All his actions are performed through the power of the Self. Other people see him acting and apparently taking decisions, and they assume that he must have a mind because they cannot imagine how this can be done without a mind.

*Question*: But the mere fact that he is alive means that the *jnani* has decided to live after Self-realisation. Can't the *jnani* use the faculty he uses to stay alive to continue his life after death?

*Swamy*: The *jnani* has no mind and no body. He is the formless Self. He only appears to be alive in the sight of those who identify him with a body. There is no question of birth or death for the *jnani* because he has already transcended them both.

*Question*: When a *jnani* dies, is there some power left in his body? Many people worship at the *samadhi* shrines of *jnanis*.

*Swamy*: What is the body? It was formed out of the five elements and it will eventually decompose into the same five elements again. When the body has decomposed, where will the power reside?

*Question*: So none of the *jnani's* power stays in the body?

*Swamy*: The *jnani* is not the body while he is alive, and he is not



the body when he dies. Both before and after the death of the physical body he only exists as the formless Self. That Self is all-powerful.

When an advanced devotee dies, his 'I'-thought may take birth in a subtle body which associates itself with his *samadhi* shrine. Such a subtle body may have some power which it can use to help devotees who worship at the shrine to fulfil their desires. A *jnani* cannot assume a subtle body like this after his death because his 'I'-thought is no longer existing. The *jnani* remains as the formless Self when he dies, so you cannot say that there is more of his power at his shrine than in other places.

*Question*: So *jnanis' samadhis* have no use at all?

*Swamy*: They are good places for concentration but they do not contain the power of the living Guru. While he is alive the *jnani* can transmit the grace of the Self to devotees. A body is needed to transmit and channel this power, and when the *jnani's* body dies, this power of transmission also disappears. While he is alive the *jnani* can use his power to quieten devotees' minds, and even bring them to an experience of the Self. The power in a *jnani's samadhi* is of a lesser order; it cannot provide the grace to realise the Self. Only a living Guru can do this.

*Question*: You say that when a *jnani* dies he does not exist in any perceivable form. Some people still see visions of Ramana Maharshi. Does this not prove that his presence still remains even though he is no longer in the body?

*Swamy*: These visions are only in the mind. Since Ramana Maharshi is not the mind, how can these visions be him? The mind brings them into existence, and apart from the mind they do not exist.

*Question*: Some people have dreams and visions of Ramana Maharshi without ever having heard of him before. If Ramana Maharshi is not now existing in any way, how can this happen?

*Swamy*: This is still only a product of the imagination. Whatever you perceive cannot be Ramana Maharshi because Ramana Maharshi is now the formless Self, and the Self cannot be perceived. One's *vasanas* [mental habits, inclinations or tendencies] may cause an image of Ramana Maharshi to appear, even if one has never heard of him before, but he is neither the image nor the cause of the image.

---

*Swamy*: Why did Ramakrishna love Vivekananda more than any

of his other devotees? If the *jnani* sees only the Self everywhere he looks, how can he appear to treat one devotee differently from another? The same thing happened at Sri Ramanasramam when Ramana Maharshi was alive. In the late 1940s many people noticed that Sri Ramana appeared to give G.V. Subbaramaiah more love and grace than anyone else. How can this be so?

It is true that the *jnani* sees the Self in all devotees, but when he looks into a devotee's eyes he also sees the devotee's mind. If the *jnani* sees that there is great devotion or a pure mind free from thoughts, then the love and grace will flow towards that particular devotee. Not all devotees have reached the same stage of development, and so the love and grace are not equally distributed. Because of this the *jnani* may ignore some people and shower his grace on others. The same grace is available for all, but it cannot be given until the devotee starts to surrender his mind to the Self.

Very advanced devotees who have reached the effortless thought-free state do not even need to go to the *jnani*. The *jnani* will come and sit at their feet and give them enough grace to realise the Self. Such is the power of self-surrender.

---

*Question*: You sometimes say that it is good to concentrate on the name and form of an enlightened one. We cannot tell who is enlightened and who is not. What happens if we concentrate on the name and form of someone who is not enlightened?
*Swamy*: Such people can help you to reach the level that they themselves have reached, but they cannot take you beyond. Such people cannot give you Self-realisation.
*Question*: So there is some process of transference of spiritual power when we concentrate on an enlightened one?
*Swamy*: Yes. If you can be constantly aware of an enlightened one then the grace of the Self will pour into you because the enlightened one is not apart from the Self.
*Question*: But how can we tell who is enlightened and who is not?
*Swamy*: You cannot, that is the problem. If you saw this girl [pointing at Saradamma] walking down the road, would you recognise her as an enlightened one?
*Question*: No.
*Swamy*: That is because you only see her body and her personality. If you were a *jnani* you would immediately recognise that she had



realised the Self. You would know that so far as her realisation is concerned she is in the same state as Ramana Maharshi. I have been telling people for six years that she is a *jnani*, but very few people believe me. They look at her body and her personality and decide that such a person cannot possibly be a *jnani*. If you try to evaluate Sarada with your mind you will never see that she has realised the Self.
*Question*: So only a *jnani* can tell who else is a *jnani*?
*Swamy*: If you still have a mind, then you cannot tell who is a *jnani* and who is not. You cannot identify a *jnani* by what he says or does because these are mind judgements. A *jnani* can identify another *jnani* only because he himself has no mind. In that state he can easily recognise other enlightened ones whose minds are dead.
*Question*: So prior to Self-realisation there is no way to recognise a *jnani*?
*Swamy*: If you are a very advanced devotee who can make the mind dive into the Self and temporarily disappear, you may be able to recognise a *jnani*; but only in that state when your mind is absent. When the mind reappears this ability will be lost.
*Question*: So how is it possible for a devotee to select a competent Guru, one who has realised the Self?
*Swamy*: It is very difficult. You must have faith in the person you believe to be a Guru. Love him and trust in the power of the Self within.

---

*Question*: Does the Guru choose the disciple or does the disciple choose the Guru?
*Swamy*: They both choose each other.
*Question*: Can a devotee choose any Guru, or is it part of his destiny [*prarabdha*] that he will meet and become the disciple of a particular Guru?
*Swamy*: It is part of his *prarabdha* that he will meet his Guru.
*Question*: Will the disciple be able to recognise his Guru when he meets him?
*Swamy*: A ripe devotee will be able to recognise his Guru when he meets him. The unripe one may not.
*Question*: You once told me that you knew that Sarada would become your devotee while you were still living near here in that hut. That was years before Sarada was even born. That is a good

example of a devotee being destined for a particular Guru.

*Swamy*: Yes, it is sometimes possible to see into the future. It is something like watching a cinema show of future events. I knew that she would come one day, but I didn't know exactly when. However, the future is not completely fixed. It can be changed by meditation and surrender.

When Narendra [Saradamma's brother] joined the military I saw that he would end up in the middle of a great accident. Sarada also had some dreams in which she saw that his *prarabdha* was coming to an end. I advised him not to join the army but he wouldn't heed the advice. He was determined to go ahead with his new job. When I saw that he would not change his mind I told him to hold on to the name of God as that would lessen or cancel the great accident he was heading for. When he eventually joined the army he was stationed in Bhopal, only a few yards from the site of the Union Carbide factory. He must have listened to the advice I gave him because when the gas leaked from the factory and killed thousands of people, he was 20 kms. out of town, upwind of the factory.

*Question*: Isn't everything predestined? Ramana Maharshi sometimes said that every act that one performs in life is determined at the moment of one's birth, and that the only freedom one has is to become aware that one is not the doer of the actions that the body is performing.

*Swamy*: This is only so if you always identify with the extroverted mind. Destiny affects only the extroverted mind. When you start to meditate and try to take the mind back to its source, you begin to transcend your *prarabdha*. The introverted mind is not governed by *prarabdha*. The more often you introvert your mind, the more you transcend your destiny.

---

*Question*: Swami Muktananda has been my Guru for the last eight years. I lived with him in his ashram for 1½ years. You say that a living Guru is essential for *moksha* [liberation]. Muktananda passed away 2½ years ago. Should I look for a living Guru, or should I carry on following Muktananda's teachings?

*Swamy*: A living Guru is necessary to realise the Self. A living Guru is necessary to give you that Self-realisation experience. If the Guru gives you that direct experience of the Self, then the Guru is no longer necessary. Did he give you that experience?

*Question*: Some flashes of it.



*Swamy*: Flashes? Flashes means. . . .

*Question*: Some glimpses.

*Swamy*: You mean seeing visions?

*Question*: I had many visions.

*Swamy*: That is not the Self, that is the mind. You have had some visions?

*Question*: Many visions, but nothing permanent.

*Swamy*: The mind looks at these visions and sees them. Seeing visions, who is the witness? The witness is the mind.

*Question*: Is the witness the Self seeing through the mind?

*Swamy*: Mind is the witness.

*Question*: So when there is Self alone there is no one to witness?

*Swamy*: The Self is one without a second. There is no mind. There is nothing outside the Self to be witnessed. The witness is in the mind, but there is no mind in the Self.

Mind will not kill the mind. Self has to kill the mind in the final stage. The grace of the Guru is quite essential to kill the mind. In the absence of this grace one cannot kill the mind and realise the Self.

---

*Swamy*: Have you seen many Gurus?

*Question*: Some, but it didn't make any difference. They could not help me to come nearer to myself.

*Swamy*: You saw only bodies. The Guru is within you all the time. A master in bodily form is necessary if you want to realise the Self.

*Question*: Are you a master?

*Swamy*: Don't take me to be the body. You should not take the Guru to be the body. He is neither the body nor the mind, he is your own Self. He is ever-present.

Realisation is nothing new; you are realised even now. It is only the mind that is making you think otherwise. In reality, the mind is non-existent; it is *jada* [inert]. It is giving you all this trouble only because you do not look within to find out where it comes from. The mind has no beginning, but it can be ended by realising the Self.

It is a non-existent thing which is causing all your troubles. It is like a thief entering into the Heart and enjoying a little bliss of the Self through the five senses. If you kill it, the Self alone will remain and you will be in eternal peace and bliss.

---

*Question*: I am a Christian but I feel attracted to name and form meditation. Can I concentrate on the name and form of Christ, and do I need a living Guru to help me in this type of meditation?
*Swamy*: During his lifetime Christ guided his disciples, but now he is dead he has no name and no form. He is the universal Self. How can you concentrate on something that has no name and no form? Repeating the name of Christ or visualising his picture may help you to concentrate, but you will not realise the Self by doing this. For that you need a living Guru. When a Guru dies he no longer has any name and form so you cannot use that name and form to get his grace because it is not his anymore. He is just the Self within, eternal peace and bliss, with no name and no form.

If you call on Christ earnestly a vision of his form may appear to you. But this is not Christ, it is just a picture created by your mind.
*Question*: You are saying that I need a living Guru to realise the Self?
*Swamy*: Yes.
*Question*: In the *Bible* Jesus says that after he goes to heaven he will send the holy spirit to guide his followers to the end of time.
*Swamy*: The spirit is the Self and the Self has guided you here. Christ is the Self. Now he no longer has a body he is within you as your own Self. "The kingdom of heaven is within you," he says. He knew that by direct experience. When he said "I and the Father are one" he was saying that there was no distinction between himself and God. That God is now within you as your own Self, but you will never realise it without a living Guru to guide you.

You have many doubts. You must have faith. Find a living Guru and have faith in him. He will give you guidance and remove all your doubts for you.
*Question*: You have previously said that Jesus was no different from any other *jnani*, and that after his bodily death no grace could be given through him. Why then did he give his disciples a particular form of ritual worship to do (the eucharist) and tell them to do it in remembrance of him?
*Swamy*: The word *jnani* means an enlightened one whose mind is dead. He is the Supreme Self, one without a second. All *jnanis* are the same Self; you cannot differentiate between them by referring to their bodies. You, due to ignorance, think that *jnanis* have bodies and differentiate between them. The error lies in you.

God came in the form of Jesus to shower his grace on disciples.



After his bodily death how will the grace flow from the dead body? After his bodily death the grace flows from the Self. So the Self itself is grace. As the Self is everywhere, his grace is also everywhere. If you do a particular form of *puja* [ritual worship] and remember him, your mind will become still. It can then dive in and realise the Self which has no name and no form and which is eternal peace and bliss. The real Jesus is ever-present. He is within you. He never left you. He is the Self.
*Question*: Christians believe that Jesus' death on the cross makes him a unique *jnani*. As Jesus says in the Bible, his blood is "poured out for the many for the forgiveness of sins". Does this have any significance? That is, does the Christian belief that Jesus' death on the cross atones for sin make him unique?
*Swamy*: The crucifixion has a symbolic meaning. The cross signifies the body and Jesus signifies the mind. At the crucifixion Jesus, the mind, died, and from that time on he emanates only as the glorious Self, which is God. Self-enquiry alone will purify you, never the blood of a *jnani*. No one had their sins wiped out when Ramana Maharshi bled after his many operations. Mahatma Gandhi's disciples were not saved from anything when he was shot and killed. It is the same with Jesus; his death and his blood saves no one.
*Question*: Having attained Self-realisation you no longer have a mind or a body. No doubt Jesus was the same, but some Christians feel that he was unique because his physical body actually rose from the dead. After his death he ate and drank with his disciples, they touched his physical form, and later they saw him rise bodily into heaven. Some Christians believe that this shows that the ultimate state of Self-realisation is not leaving behind the body and the mind, but for a pure body and mind to be given eternal life in the Self. Could this be true? Jesus himself speaks of a universal resurrection in the Bible.
*Swamy*: The *jnani* is not the body and he is not the mind, so it is not important what happens to that body after death. He may leave the body behind or it may disappear into the sky. It was Jesus' destiny that his body disappear into the sky. The same thing happened to Tukaram whose body also disappeared into the sky. People want superstition and never want the bare truth.

*Earlier in the book it was reported that both Ramana Maharshi and Lakshmana Swamy regarded Arunachala as God himself in the form*

*of a mountain. Ramana Maharshi has stated that the mountain was his Guru, and that through its power he realised the Self. Lakshmana Swamy accepts that the mountain radiates the power of the Self in the same way that a* jnani *does, but he feels that devotees who are not as advanced as Sri Ramana was at the age of 16 cannot realise the Self through its power. He says that meditating at Arunachala is very beneficial, but he advises devotees who want to realise the Self not to depend on it for their realisation. The next two conversations summarise his views on the subject.*

*Question*: The Self is everywhere, yet both you and Ramana Maharshi say that Arunachala is the Self. In what way is this so?
*Swamy*: It is a great mystery but one cannot deny that it is so. One may say that Arunachaleswara [the presiding deity at Arunachala], who is not other than the Self, took the form of Arunachala out of compassion for devotees. Just as the power of the Self can be transmitted through the Guru's body, this same Self-power is transmitted from the form of Arunachala.

In your question you say that the Self is everywhere, but this is not strictly true. The Self cannot be explained in terms of time and space; it is beyond them both.
*Question*: You say that Arunachaleswara took the form of Arunachala. Does this mean that there was a Self-realised being or entity called Arunachaleswara who took the form of the mountain?
*Swamy*: No. There is only the Self. Arunachaleswara is only another name for the Self. In its gross form it appears as the mountain. In its subtle form it may manifest as lights or visions. Sarada saw the subtle form of Arunachala when she had a vision of Siva dancing on the peak of the mountain. The real form cannot be perceived; it is the Self.

Ramana Maharshi sometimes recounted dreams and visions in which he had seen cities and people inside Arunachala. When he was once asked if they were real, he waved his hand around him and said "They are as real as all this". This is the answer of a *jnani*. For a *jnani* the only difference between the waking state, the dream state and visions is the amount of time that they last. In all other respects they are equally real and equally unreal.

---

*Question*: You say that Arunachala is the Self. Ramana Maharshi



speaks of it as his Guru. It is not a living Guru, but through its grace alone Sri Ramana realised the Self.
*Swamy*: Ramana Maharshi was one of those rare exceptions who realised the Self through the inner Guru alone. Devotees who are not as advanced as he was cannot hope to succeed without a living Guru.
*Question*: Is not the power that comes from Arunachala the same as the power that comes from the human Guru?
*Swamy*: Yes, it is the same power, but only the human Guru is able to use this power to bring about the final destruction of the ego.
*Question*: If Arunachala alone cannot do this, what is the point in staying here [at Arunachala]?
*Swamy*: Staying here is very beneficial. The power that is flowing from Arunachala stills and purifies the mind. Devotees who live and meditate here will make good progress. The grace of Arunachala can take one to the final state of *sadhana*, which is the effortless thought-free state, but for the final destruction of the ego a human Guru is required.

*It is widely believed, particularly in India, that to be a Guru one must have* siddhis *(psychic powers such as telepathy, clairvoyance etc.) and use them occasionally. Swamy is of the opposite view; he says that anyone who claims to have* siddhis, *or displays them and claims responsibility for them, cannot be a* jnani. *In the final part of this chapter Swamy explains the logic behind this contrary view.*

*Swamy*: You will never find a *jnani* giving exhibitions of *siddhis*. For whom is the *jnani* to show off his power? Where is the 'I' that is going to perform the *siddhis*? The *jnani* knows that only the Self exists. Miracles may sometimes happen in the proximity of a *jnani*, but he will never claim responsibility for them. If someone brings a problem to a *jnani*, the problem is registered in the Heart, and the response comes automatically. The automatic activity of the Heart attends to all such problems. There is no question of the *jnani* doing anything; it is all automatic.

---

*Swamy*: Many people see lights and visions during their meditation, and some people develop *siddhis*. All these phenomena belong to the mind and have nothing to do with the Self or with realisation.

Muktananda's Guru, Nityananda, had many *siddhis*, and he frequently gave public displays of them. I cannot imagine why a *jnani* would want to behave like this. Many miracles happened in the presence of Ramana Maharshi but he never claimed responsibility for them and he certainly never gave public displays of them. Miracles may happen spontaneously in the presence of a *jnani*, or even at a distance if the devotee's faith in his Guru is strong, but the *jnani* himself does nothing. He knows that everything that needs to be done is done automatically by the Self. Consequently, he has no need or desire to indulge in *siddhis*.

Many miracles happened around Christ, but he never displayed his powers for entertainment, and he never claimed, "I have done this miracle". The miracles happened spontaneously through the power of the Self.

Who is displaying *siddhis* if there is no mind?

*Question*: Some books say that *siddhis* come automatically to one who has realised the Self. They just manifest themselves as part of his *prarabdha* [destiny].

*Swamy*: The *jnani* has no *prarabdha*. If there is no mind, where is the *prarabdha*? *Siddhis* happen in his presence automatically. He need not worry about performing *siddhis*; that is all automatic action. He won't display *siddhis*; they will happen in his presence, that's all. If you ask him he will say that he has no *siddhis*.

Who is displaying *siddhis* to whom, as there is only one without a second. I don't care for *siddhis*, however wonderful they may be. I never saw Ramana Maharshi displaying *siddhis*. They happened in his presence that's all. He was unconcerned about them and untroubled by them.

I am not impressed by miracles. Miracles only occur if there is a mind. If there is no mind, there are no miracles.

*References:*

[1] *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*, p. 75.

[2] *Guru Ramana*, pp. 101–102.

# 8
# *SADHANA*

The Guru does not transmit his grace unless the devotee makes some attempt to control or surrender his mind. This chapter is devoted to descriptions of the various techniques through which the devotee can achieve this end. I have sub-divided the chapter into seven sections; the first six deal with specific forms of *sadhana* or spiritual experience while the final one contains general advice for spiritual aspirants.

## Self-enquiry

Lakshmana Swamy realised the Self through a spontaneous act of self-enquiry. He now teaches that this method (that is, scrutinising the nature of the 'I'-thought or seeking its origin), is the most direct way of realising the Self. This is the same method that Sri Ramana taught for nearly 50 years. Sri Ramana recommended it to almost everyone who came to him for advice, but Sri Lakshmana feels that it can only be successfully practised by devotees who have attained some degree of mind control. Sri Ramana himself sometimes admitted that self-enquiry could only be practised by 'ripe souls', but that didn't stop him from encouraging most of his visitors to adopt the technique.

It is not necessary to give a detailed account of the method here since it has already been described in chapter two (pp. 14–15). However, a brief summary may be helpful. According to both Sri Ramana and Sri Lakshmana the 'I'-thought rises from the Heart, identifies itself with the body and creates the illusion of an individual self by identifying itself with all the body's thoughts and perceptions. If one can focus all one's attention on the 'I'-thought, that is, on the inner feeling of 'I' or 'I am', ignoring all other mental activities, then the 'I'-thought will stop identifying with thoughts and perceptions and start to subside into its source, the Heart. When it has completely subsided into the Heart the illusion of the individual self vanishes.

As an aid to keeping one's attention on the 'I'-thought both

Ramana Maharshi and Lakshmana Swamy recommend asking oneself 'Who am I?' or 'Where does this "I" come from?'. In the following quotations Sri Ramana explains how this process works and describes how the method can be used to discover that the mind is an unreal or illusory entity.

> The mind will subside only by means of the enquiry 'Who am I?'. The thought 'Who am I?', destroying all other thoughts, will itself be finally destroyed like the stick used for stirring the funeral pyre. If other thoughts rise one should, without attempting to complete them, enquire 'To whom did they rise?'. What does it matter how many thoughts rise? At the very moment that each thought rises, if one vigilantly enquires 'To whom did this rise?', it will be known 'To me'. If one then enquires 'Who am I?' the mind will turn back to its source [the Self] and the thought that had risen will also subside. By repeatedly practising thus, the power of the mind to abide in its source increases.[1]
>
> If the mind becomes introverted through enquiry into the source of the *aham-vritti* [the 'I'-thought], the *vasanas* [mental habits or tendencies] become extinct. The light of the Self falls on the *vasanas* and produces the phenomenon of reflection we call the mind. Thus, when the *vasanas* become extinct the mind also disappears, being absorbed into the light of the one reality, the Heart.
>
> This is the sum and substance of all that an aspirant need know. What is imperatively required of him is an earnest and one-pointed enquiry into the source of the *aham-vritti*.[2]
>
> When the mind unceasingly investigates its own nature it transpires that there is no such thing as mind. This is the direct path for all. The mind is merely thoughts. Of all the thoughts the thought 'I' is the root. Therefore the mind is only the thought 'I'. From where does this 'I' arise? Seek for it within; it then vanishes. This is the pursuit of wisdom.[3]

*Question*: I have been practising self-enquiry. I ask myself 'Who am I?' and I get to a stage where I realise that I am not the mind. This is followed by a feeling of emptiness. How is one to go beyond this feeling?



*Swamy*: Who says that he is not the mind and who experiences the emptiness?

*Question*: I do not understand.

*Swamy*: It is your mind. All your experiences and questions are still within the mind. Deciding that you are not the mind is an activity of the mind. Experiencing a feeling of emptiness is also an experience of the mind. If you want to go beyond the mind by self-enquiry you should not stop with experiences or mental judgements. You must keep up the quest 'Who am I?'. Ask yourself 'Who experiences emptiness?', 'Who thinks that he is not the mind?'. Pursue the quest earnestly by questioning thoughts as soon as they arise. Eventually the 'I' will go back to its source and experience the bliss of the Self. Don't be satisfied with answers to the question 'Who am I?', or with experiences—these are all in the mind.

---

*Swamy*: The first thought to appear is the 'I'-thought. It rises in the Heart and, in a split second, travels to the brain, identifies with the body and the senses, and then sees the world around it as a real world.

Follow the quest 'Who am I?'. Follow the 'I' back to its source. When the 'I' goes back to its source and identifies with the Self instead of with the senses, there is eternal peace and bliss. To do this you have to get rid of all thoughts. The first of all thoughts is the 'I'-thought. Give up all other thoughts and catch hold of the 'I'-thought. The Self will then embrace that 'I' and devour it.

---

*Swamy*: Effort and grace are both necessary in order to follow the quest successfully, but without *vichara* [self-enquiry] there is no grace, and without grace there is no *vichara*.

You can hold onto the 'I'-thought by your own effort; more than that you cannot do. If the candle comes near the sun what will happen? It will melt away. The same thing will happen to the mind if you hold onto the the 'I'-thought. When it goes back to its source in the Heart, the Self will consume it until only the Self remains.

In the Self there is no 'I'-thought, there is no mind, and there are no thoughts.

*Question*: Is it necessary to practise self-enquiry in a sitting position?

*Swamy*: If the mind continues with its thoughts, then sitting meditation is of no use. The mind has to be still. When the mind is still there is bliss. If you can repeatedly dive into the Self by following the quest 'Who am I?', and abide there, this will lead to constant Self-abidance.

*Question*: When I look into who I am, the mind becomes still. But only for the moment. After a few moments silence I find myself in the middle of thoughts again. Then I remember the self-enquiry again and become silent for a while. Then I forget again. It goes on like this all day long.

*Swamy*: Yes, it is like this, but with more and more practice the mind becomes still.

For me this world is a waking dream. If you are in this state, then there is no birth or death for you; or sleep. First look into yourself. Just sit every day for half an hour and look into the source of the 'I'. Ask yourself, 'What is the source of this "I"?'.

Without thought there is bliss. Thought itself is pain.

*Question*: Sometimes questions come up. They are in the mind of course. Should I just disregard them and go on with the quest, or should I look for an answer?

*Swamy*: Go on with the quest and leave them alone.

*Question*: Can I also meditate on Ramana Maharshi's form?

*Swamy*: If you follow the quest earnestly, then meditating on Ramana Maharshi's form will not be necessary. What are name and form? They exist only in ignorance. Self-enquiry is the shortest way to Self-realisation. However, one has to be an advanced devotee in order to make the mind go back to its source through the quest 'Who am I?'.

---

*Question*: In self-enquiry, after concentrating the mind, I become aware of the thoughts and enquire as to their source, and I find that it is an 'I am', a beingness that is present before and after every passing thought. Then I just try to hold on to this sense of 'I am', and when any thought arises I just try to bring the mind back to it. Is this practice correct? Is anything else needed?

*Swamy*: In self-enquiry you have to catch hold of the 'I'-thought by giving up other thoughts. If other thoughts intrude ask yourself 'For whom are these thoughts?' and you will find that the answer is 'They are occurring to me'. Then question yourself as to who is this



'I' that is having these thoughts, or ask yourself, 'Where does this "I" come from?'. If you are ripe, that is, free from other thoughts, the 'I' dives into itself and experiences the bliss of the Self. In the end the 'I', which is the mind, must die. The mind won't kill the mind by itself so the grace of the Guru, who is the Self, is most important. The death of the mind is Self-realisation. As there is no mind after realisation, the Self remains alone, one without a second. It is eternal peace and bliss and it is beyond time and death.

It is difficult to reach that beingness that you describe. Beingness means 'I am' and 'I am' means the Self. When the mind is quiet the 'I'-thought may experience a little of the bliss that is emanating from the Self, but you will not experience pure beingness until the 'I'-thought has completely subsided into the Heart. Your imagination is making you think that a peaceful or blissful experience of the 'I'-thought is an experience of 'I am' or the Self. This belief has arisen because of ignorance, because you have not experienced the real 'I' as it really is.

First try to keep the mind still, that is, without thoughts.

---

*Swamy*: The quest 'Who am I?' is to seek the source of the mind, to find out where in the body the 'I'-thought arises. Whenever an advanced devotee becomes aware of the 'I'-thought within him, he will find that it subsides and finally disappears in the Heart-centre on the right side of the chest. When the 'I'-thought subsides into the Heart and finally dies, this is realisation.

Making the 'I'-thought subside into the Heart is very difficult. It can only be done by advanced devotees or by those who have practised meditation for a long time. For beginners it is usually better to meditate on the name and form of their God or Guru. When they have succeeded in steadying their mind by this method, they will find self-enquiry much easier.

---

*Swamy*: What is religion? I don't know the answer to that. I don't know anything about all these religions. So many religions, all insisting that they know the truth. Hindus say that the *Bhagavad Gita* contains the truth, the Christians say that the truth can only be found in the *Bible* while the Muslims say that it is all in the *Koran*.

Followers of different religions are always fighting and quarrelling

with each other about whose religion is correct. Sometimes they even have wars because they cannot agree on what truth is. No one wants to give up their life in search of truth, which is what is required for Self-realisation, but many people will happily kill someone else just to prove that their beliefs are the only correct ones.

At the end of all religious paths there is the quest 'Who am I?'. Until that question is satisfactorily answered no one can claim to know what the truth is or what God is. The ultimate instruction in all religions should therefore be 'Know thyself'. When one looks for the source of the 'I' by asking the question 'Who am I?', the 'I' or the mind sinks into the Heart and experiences the bliss of the Self. When the individual 'I' dies at the end of the quest only the Self remains. That Self is not Hindu, not Christian and not Buddhist because it has no name, no form and no religion.

This path of self-enquiry was taught by Bhagavan Sri Ramana. He knew, from his direct experience of the Self, that the 'I' must go back into the Heart and die. He also knew that self-enquiry was the only direct way to make this happen. Actually, the method is not a new one. The sage Vasishtha taught it to Rama in the *Yoga Vasishtha*, but most people had forgotten about this. Ramana Maharshi was only reviving a technique that had been taught and practised long ago.

How can I be a Hindu or a Christian? Is this body a Hindu? The body is inert, being composed of the five elements; it has no religious beliefs. Is the mind a Hindu? There is no mind and no individual self after Self-realisation, so how can something that does not exist be a Hindu? The Self cannot be a Hindu because it is nameless and formless.

The followers of different religions quarrel about truth because they have never experienced it. Most of them don't even try to experience it; they are much happier quarrelling, fighting and killing each other. The truth is actually very simple: when the individual self dies in the Heart, which is what happens if one successfully follows the quest 'Who am I?', the Self alone remains, one without a second. That Self is truth, that Self is God. What can be simpler than that? But people don't want simplicity, they want something complicated so that they can argue and fight over it.

**Love, devotion and surrender**

Sri Lakshmana endorses Ramana Maharshi's view that there are



only two effective ways to realise to Self: one must either practise self-enquiry or one must completely surrender to God or the Guru.

To follow the path of surrender successfully, one must feel intense love and devotion towards God or the Guru. Mathru Sri Sarada generated this kind of love by constantly being aware of Sri Lakshmana's name and form. Sri Lakshmana now recommends this technique to most devotees who ask him for spiritual advice. He defines true devotion in the following terms:

> *Swamy*: What is meditation? What is devotion? True devotion is loving God or the Guru. If one can think of God or the Guru and love him continuously without any other thoughts arising, then that is surrender. Ultimately, the 'I' must dissolve in love for the Guru.

As with self-enquiry, self-surrender can only take one to the stage which Sri Lakshmana calls 'the effortless thought-free state'. When this stage is reached, individual effort is no longer possible. From then on, it is the grace of the Guru which pulls the 'I'-thought back into the Self and destroys it.

*Swamy*: God is not apart from you; he is within you as your own Self. This Self is beyond time and beyond birth and death. It is eternal peace and bliss. If you want to reach that peace and bliss you must either undertake the enquiry 'Who am I?' or you must completely surrender to your God or Guru.

*Vichara* [self-enquiry] and surrender are not really separate. *Vichara* stimulates devotion, and surrender stimulates a spirit of enquiry. Both practices culminate in a still, thought-free mind, and both cause the grace of the Self, who is the Guru within, to flow.

---

*Question*: It seems that you transmitted the power of the Self to Sarada, and she realised the Self. Why can't you give this same power to all of us and give us Self-realisation?

*Swamy*: The power is the Self, and the Self can neither be given nor taken. You are the Self now. No one can take it from you and no one can give it to you. Sarada surrendered completely. She reached the effortless thought-free state, and her humility and self-surrender were so complete that the Self, acting through the Guru, was com-

pelled to reach out and destroy her ego. Be still, be quiet, be humble, be without thoughts, and the Guru will do the same for you.

If you give all your love to the Guru, grace will easily come. You must surrender to the Guru and love him whole-heartedly. You have to surrender without reserve and then he will look after you. He will ask you to dive in. He, being in the Heart, pulls the mind towards him and establishes it there. That is the Guru's grace.

---

*Question*: Is concentration on the name and form of the Guru a good practice if one is following the path of love and surrender? Is such a practice enough or should I do something else to increase my devotion?
*Swamy*: Concentration on name and form is not merely a beginners' practice. If it is done with love and devotion, and if the form can be held continuously without any other thought arising, then such a practice can take one all the way to Self-realisation.

Before Sarada realised the Self I tried to get her to take up self-enquiry, but she was not interested. She only wanted to hold on to my name and form, and in the end that was enough. By following this method she realised the Self in three years.

---

*Question*: When one follows the path of love and surrender, is it good to want the Guru's love?
*Swamy*: One should love for love's sake and not for any other reason.
*Question*: So one should not expect or desire the Guru's love or grace?
*Swamy*: If a devotee really loves the Guru, then the Guru's love will flow into him. If you love the Guru you need not worry about his response; his love will automatically flow into you.

When a devotee first comes to a Guru, the Guru may appear to be indifferent to him. He may even try to convince the devotee that he doesn't care about him. This is just a test of the devotee's love. He must show that he can love the Guru even when the Guru is ignoring him or abusing him. If the devotee can demonstrate this kind of love, then the Guru will be more open about giving his love to the devotee.

If the Guru shows his love immediately, then it may make the



devotee complacent and he may be deterred from making further attempts to increase his love. The Guru often has to use tricks and tests like this to evaluate the devotee's love and to increase it.

When a devotee's love increases to the point where he is always thinking of the Guru, then the Guru will no longer be able to hide his love for the devotee. He may still wish to test the devotee in many ways, but he will not be able to conceal his love for him.

The Guru's tests may take many forms: he may appear to love one devotee more than another to see if he can provoke jealousy or anger; he may get angry with the devotee; he may even try to drive him away. The devotee must retain his equanimity and love through all such tests. He must not react by getting angry or by leaving the Guru; if he does he fails the tests.

### Japa and mantras

Sri Lakshmana encourages his devotees to repeat the name of their God or Guru (*nama-japa*) either as a means of strengthening their devotion or as a preliminary exercise for those who want to follow the path of self-enquiry. The following two conversations illustrate his views on both approaches. It should be noted that two of the last three answers in the first conversation are given by Saradamma and not by Swamy.

*Question*: You sometimes say that self-enquiry is for very few people, and that for most people it will be better if they do *japa* or *pranayama*. Am I to follow the path of self-enquiry, or shall I carry on with my *japa*?
*Swamy*: It is better for most people to start with *japa*, *pranayama* or devotion. Or surrender without reservation to the Guru.
*Question*: Which is the best path for me to follow?
*Swamy*: First follow devotion or *japa*. In your case you can do *japa*. What has your Guru taught you?
*Question*: He told me to do *japa*.
*Swamy*: Who is doing *japa*? It is the mind. In the end you have to follow the quest 'Who am I?' and find the source of the mind. If you find it you will realise the Self. In the final stages of *sadhana* you have to follow the quest or surrender.
*Question*: Is *japa* the best method for me?

*Swamy*: It can lead you to Self-realisation. It is enough if you do it constantly.
*Question*: Should I carry on saying my old *mantra*, or does Swamy want to give me a new one?
*Swamy*: Which one are you repeating?
*Question*: *Om Namah Sivaya.*
*Swamy*: You can keep that name if it is suitable for you. It is enough. Siva means Self.
*Question*: Can Swamy give me some other hints for my *sadhana*?
*Swamy*: Siva is Self. He is within you on the right side of the chest.* If you are earnest he will give you a vision in your Heart. The Self has no name and no form, but it can appear before you as a form if you are earnest. It can also give you an effortless thought-free state wherein the 'I' dives into the Heart and feels the bliss of the Self. But you must be earnest.
*Question*: So I must always be doing *japa*?
*Saradamma*: Always doing *japa* is good for concentration, but sometimes there is no feeling of happiness when you are doing it. One should have love and devotion towards the name that one is repeating. When I was doing *sadhana* I found that when I looked at Swamy's face and thought of him, then I invariably felt happy and blissful.
*Swamy*: Guru means Self. He is not the body and he is not the mind. Looking at or thinking of the Guru means that you are being aware of the Self.
*Saradamma*: If you like looking at the Guru's face, or thinking of him, then do it. If you don't like doing this, then do *japa*. Looking at Swamy's face is very good. I know this from personal experience. Swamy says that some people don't like doing this, but I say look all the time.

---

*Question*: Is there any power inherent in a *mantra*, or is it only a focus for concentration?
*Swamy*: If a Self-realised Guru gives you a *mantra*, then there will be some power in it.
*Question*: I am asking this because some time ago I had a dream in which I was attacked by asuras [demons]. As they were attacking

* The Heart-centre, the place in the body where the 'I'-thought arises.



me I spontaneously said *Om Sivaya Namah** just once. The attack stopped and I woke up immediately. I had not been saying this *mantra* before, but it came to me automatically in my sleep.
*Swamy*: Yes, this is possible.
*Question*: Should I start saying this *mantra*? Should I take this dream as *upadesa* [spiritual teaching]?
*Swamy*: You can start saying it if you want to. The Self has shown you this *mantra*, so you can carry on repeating it.
*Question*: Before this dream I used to repeat Arunachala-Siva as a *mantra*. But no one had initiated me into this, I just started doing it myself. Should I stop repeating Arunachala-Siva and start repeating *Om Sivaya Namah*? I know it is not good to change *mantras*, but bearing in mind the circumstances under which this one was given to me, would it be good for me to change?
*Swamy*: Both *mantras* are equally good, and you can say whichever you prefer. In both cases you are calling on Siva. The real Siva has no name and no form, but if you give him a name and call on him he will respond. What is your own name?
*Question*: Nadhia.
*Swamy*: You were not born with this name, and it is not printed on your back or forehead, but if I call "Nadhia" you will respond. The Self will also respond to whatever name you give it. If you give it a name and constantly repeat it, you are remembering the Self and invoking the power of the Self.

Once, when I was at Sri Ramanasramam, Ramana Maharshi called me in the Heart. I was sound asleep in my room at the time, but the word 'Lakshmana' sounding in the Heart woke me up immediately. Sarada once did the same thing to me when I was sleeping in this house. To get a response from the Self, all you have to do is give it a name and then call on it with love and devotion.
*Question*: I have heard that there are certain rhythms or tunes which add power to the *mantra*. Is this true? Must one chant the *mantra* in a particular way, or is it all right to do it more or less mechanically?
*Swamy*: There is no harm in repeating a *mantra* mechanically. It doesn't really matter how you say or pronounce the words. It is more important to have good concentration and good devotion towards the name that you are repeating.

* *Om*, obeisance to Siva.

**Yoga and kundalini**

Sri Lakshmana has very radical views on traditional yoga practices. He states that the true *kundalini* is synonymous with the mind, and that it rises from the Heart-centre on the right side of the chest, not from the *muladhara chakra* at the base of the spine. This Heart-centre is not one of the yogic *chakras*, but the centre from which the mind originates in the body. Sri Ramana described its location as being "two digits to the right of the centre-line" (the breast bone). Sri Lakshmana has experienced this centre himself and so his comments on it come from direct experience.

When asked about the value of traditional yogic exercises, his usual response is that they will not bring about Self-realisation; he usually adds that such exercises are only useful for people who want to obtain psychic powers (*siddhis*).

*Question*: I have read different books on yogic and tantric traditions and they all speak of the *kundalini* rising from the *muladhara chakra* [at the base of the spine] to the *sahasrara chakra* [just above the top of the head]. They say that when the *kundalini* reaches the *sahasrara*, this is the final state, *moksha*, or liberation.
*Swamy*: It is not final. It has to go from the Heart to the *sahasrara* and then back to the Heart again for realisation to occur. *Kundalini sakti* means the mind. It rises from the Heart-centre to the brain. When it goes back into the Heart and dies there, that is *moksha*, the final state.

*Kundalini sakti* means mind. You feel it rising from the Heart-centre to the brain only on the day of Self-realisation. Before that day you cannot feel it. The mind rises from the Heart daily after sleep, but you are not aware of it. It rises to the brain, looks at the world through the five senses and enjoys what it sees. Then it goes back to the Heart again. But none of this is felt by the devotee.
*Question*: So the *kundalini* tradition is not speaking from the highest standpoint?
*Swamy*: The *kundalini* tradition is not speaking from the highest standpoint because it does not teach that the mind must go back to the Heart for the final realisation to occur. When you speak of the *kundalini* rising to the *sahasrara* you are speaking of a yogic state



which is not the highest state. Making the *kundalini* rise to the *sahasrara* may be useful if you want *siddhis*, but it will not bring about Self-realisation. What is *kundalini sakti*? It is only the mind rising from the Heart to the brain.
*Question*: It is said that when the *kundalini* rises to the *sahasrara*, Siva and *Sakti* merge. Is this so?
*Swamy*: No. *Sakti* means mind. It has to return back to its source, the Heart, which is Siva, and die there.
*Question*: So you are saying that *kundalini* is only in the mind. Is this correct?
*Swamy*: No, that is not correct. It *is* the mind. My direct experience is that the mind rises from the Heart to the brain, never from the *muladhara* to the *sahasrara*. That is only a yogic state which people can attain if they want to perform miracles.

A woman once came here and said that 19 years before, her *kundalini* had gone from the *muladhara* to the *sahasrara*, and that she had had a vision in the form of a flash of light. This is something that can be achieved by the practice of yoga, but it has nothing to do with Self-realisation. When yogis make the *kundalini* go from the *muladhara* to the *sahasrara*, it all takes place within their mind or their imagination. They may be able to do miracles as a result, but what use are miracles? Performing miracles will not help one to realise the Self.

---

*Swamy*: Making the *kundalini* rise from the *muladhara* to the *sahasrara* is a mental activity. It will not take one beyond the mind, and it will not kill the mind. For realisation, the mind must sink into the Heart and be destroyed by the Self. The raising of the *kundalini* through yogic practices does not result in realisation, even when the *kundalini* reaches the *sahasrara*. Such an achievement is an achievement of the mind; realisation can only result from the destruction of the mind.

There is a channel which runs from the Heart-centre to the brain; it is called the *amrita nadi*. The mind rises to the brain through this channel and then goes back into the Heart-centre again during sleep or deep meditation. The mind rising and falling in this channel is the true *kundalini*.

At the moment of realisation the 'I'-thought goes down this

channel and is destroyed in the Heart. After realisation neither the *amrita nadi* nor the Heart-centre are of any importance. The *jnani* then knows that he is the all-pervading Self.

**The mind and its control**

Sri Lakshmana maintains that the mind is only an illusion which is generated when the rising 'I'-thought identifies itself with the body and imagines that it is an individual person. This illusion is then sustained by the constant stream of thoughts which the mind generates; the 'I'-thought identifies with all of them and thereby sustains the assumption that the self or the mind is a continuous and real entity. Sri Lakshmana says that if the mind is completely deprived of thoughts, the 'I'-thought will sink back into the Heart, and the illusory mind will disappear. Because the mind is the source of all the individual's problems, and because it cannot survive without thoughts, Sri Lakshmana frequently tells his devotees that all their problems would be solved if they could only keep themselves in a thought-free state.

Swamy sometimes talks about the mind in terms of the three *gunas*: *sattva* (purity or harmony), *rajas* (activity) and *tamas* (inertia). He says that a mind that is full of *tamas* is difficult to control, whereas a *sattvic* mind can easily be made to dive into the Self. He seems to regard the *rajasic* mind as a desirable stepping stone on the way from *tamas* to *sattva*. He maintains that spiritual exercises such as *japa* and *pranayama* purify the mind, increase its *sattva* content at the expense of the *rajas* and *tamas*, and make it easier for the 'I'-thought to sink back into its source.

*Swamy*: The Self is ever-present; there is no question of realising it. You can neither reach it nor attain it because you are the Self even now. It is said that the mind prevents one from being aware of the Self, but the mind is non-existent. The Self alone exists, and one who knows this knows that there is no birth, no death, no mind, no time and no question of enlightenment. This is the final truth.

If you think, "This is not my experience" or "How shall I realise the Self?", then the mind will appear to exist. All such thoughts and doubts arise in the mind. Deprive the mind of such thoughts and mind itself disappears. Be quiet and still and all thoughts will disappear. Self-enquiry and surrender are only techniques which bring one to the state of inner stillness and quietness. The ultimate instruction is therefore, "Be still and quiet; stabilise in this state and the Self will be revealed". This instruction, "Be quiet and still", is likely to be misunderstood by ordinary people, and so it is only given to ripe devotees.



---

*Question*: You say that the mind does not exist. How can something that does not exist cause so much trouble and prevent us from being aware of the Self?

*Swamy*: If you are obsessed with such thoughts as "Does the mind exist?" or "How can something that does not exist be bothering me?", then these thoughts will keep your attention away from the Self. The *jnani* knows that the mind does not exist, but you will never discover this state if you spend your time indulging in thoughts such as these.

*Question*: If I am the Self now, what is preventing me from being aware of this?

*Swamy*: Your thoughts and desires. Get rid of them.

*Question*: You say get rid of desires, but one can only get rid of desires if one has fully satisfied them and grown tired of them. Otherwise it is just repression.

*Swamy*: The mind is like a fire which is fuelled by thoughts and desires. If there are no thoughts or desires, then the fire of the mind will die out. Indulging in one's desires in the hope of transcending them is like attempting to extinguish a fire by pouring kerosene on it.

*Question*: But there is a problem. Wanting to be without thoughts is also a desire. There is no escape. One is either immersed in thoughts and desires or the mind is occupied with the desire to get rid of them. What am I to do?

*Swamy*: Your doubts are in the mind, and it is the mind that is preventing you from realising the Self. Even if you get answers to these doubts, the answers are still only in the mind. Answers produce more questions, and these questions and answers will continue until you die unless you ignore the mind by keeping your attention turned towards the Self. Don't think about desires and how to get rid of them. Just be still and quiet and all your doubts and desires will vanish.

These questions and answers are not benefiting you. They are just filling your mind with thoughts. My last piece of advice to you is to be humble. Be humble at all times and your humility will take you to the goal.

---

*Question*: What are the different stages or levels of the mind that one passes through before realising the Self?
*Swamy*: Mind is only thoughts. The more easily you can be without thoughts, the nearer you are to a direct experience of the Self. To make the mind die you must deprive it of thoughts. The effortless thought-free state is the highest level of practice.

There are no stages or degrees of realisation, there are only stages of spiritual practice. The final stage of *sadhana* is this effortless thought-free state. If this state can be maintained, then the 'I' will sink into the Self and it will experience the bliss of the Self. This is not realisation, for there is still an 'I' which is experiencing the bliss of the Self. These experiences are only temporary; the 'I' will continue to reassert itself until the moment of realisation. Realisation can only happen in this effortless thought-free state, for it is only in this state that the Self can destroy the 'I'-thought. The 'I'-thought, which is the mind, must die completely before Self-realisation occurs.
*Question*: How is one to make the mind die?
*Swamy*: The mind can never eliminate itself without the grace of the Self. The mind is afraid of its own death; it will not do anything to endanger its own existence. It is like a thief who poses as a policeman in order to catch himself; the thief will only pretend to catch himself because ultimately he wants to escape. Similarly with the mind. The mind will engage in *sadhana*, thinking that it wants to destroy itself, but as soon as the mind starts to sink into the Heart, a great fear arises which prevents the mind from completely subsiding. This fear is part of the mind's self-defence mechanism, and you will never overcome it by effort alone. It is because of this that you need the grace of the Guru. When you concentrate on the name and form of the Guru, or try to be without thoughts, the grace of the Guru calms the mind and helps it to overcome the fear which would otherwise prevent it from completely subsiding.
*Question*: Why is it necessary for the mind to die?
*Swamy*: The mind must die, there is no other way to realise the



Self. Some people say that complete equanimity of mind is Self-realisation, but this is not true. This is only a stage one passes through on the way to Self-realisation. Other people say that seeing the Self or God everywhere is Self-realisation, but this is not true either. To see the Self everywhere there must be an 'I' who sees, and while that 'I' exists the mind will also exist. The *jnani* does not see anything because the seeing entity in him has died. In the Self there is no seeing, only being. When the mind still exists one can reach a stage where one can see the whole world as a manifestation of the Self, but when the mind dies, there is no one who sees and no world to be seen.

If you have a mind then the earth, the sky and the stars will exist and you will be able to see them. When the mind dies there will be no earth, no sky, no stars and no world. The world of objects, names and forms is only the mind, and when the mind dies, the world dies with it. Only the Self then remains.

Seeing everything as the Self gives the impression that the Self is equally distributed everywhere. This is also an idea in the mind. When the mind finally dies you realise that there is no distribution and no everywhere.

---

*Swamy*: Self-realisation can be compared to the rising of the sun. First there is the blackness of total darkness. This is the mental state of *tamas*. Most people in the world are fully immersed in this *tamas* state. Just before dawn a red band appears on the horizon. This red symbolises the *rajas* state, and when the *rajas* increases at the expense of *tamas*, this is an indication that a little spiritual progress is being made. Next, daylight comes. The sun has not yet risen, but the sky is white in colour. This white is the white of *sattva*, and when the whiteness of *sattva* has dispelled the blackness and redness of night and early dawn, it is an indication that realisation is near. Finally the sun appears in a blazing light. This is Self-realisation.

Although there are prior indications of its imminent arrival, when Self-realisation finally comes it comes completely unexpectedly.

---

*Question*: A foreigner at Sri Ramanasramam went crazy a few months ago. He was very disturbed for several weeks. I looked after him for a while, but now he has partially recovered and returned to

Sathya Sai Baba's ashram. He lived there for several years before coming to Sri Ramanasramam. He was claiming to be God for several weeks and at times he got quite violent. What can one do with such people?

*Swamy*: If he went mad then one can only say that it was his destiny to go mad.

*Question*: His problems seem to be spiritual rather than mental. When he is with Sai Baba or at Arunachala he seems to become mentally unbalanced, but when he stays somewhere else, he seems to be normal.

*Swamy*: He probably has no *sattva* in his mind, and that is why spiritual power unbalances him.

*Question*: He wants to come here and see you. What should I tell him?

*Swamy*: It might be dangerous for him to come. When a *jnani* looks at a devotee, the power of the Self enhances the *sattva* in the devotee's mind at the expense of the *rajas* and *tamas*. Mentally unbalanced people often have little or no *sattva* and so the *jnani's* power enhances their *rajas* and *tamas* instead. If there is no *sattva* in his mind, and if he is completely mad, then the power of the *jnani* may even kill him. There is nothing that can be done with people like this because they have no *sattva* to work with.

**Samadhi**

When the mind has been sufficiently purified or controlled it may start to experience various states of *samadhi*. When he talks about these states Sri Lakshmana normally identifies three different levels of experience:

1) *Savikalpa samadhi*: an advanced stage of concentration in which the mind, by constant effort, continuously holds on to the object it is meditating on.
2) *Kevala nirvikalpa samadhi*: this occurs when the mind temporarily disappears and leaves an experience of the Self in which there is no awareness of the body or the world.
3) *Sahaja nirvikalpa samadhi*: in this state the mind has been permanently destroyed. When one has reached this state one is able to function normally in the world even though the mind has been completely eliminated. This is the state of the *jnani*.

Sometimes a *jnani* withdraws into the Self and loses awareness of



his body and the world. This happened to Ramana Maharshi in the 1890s, to Lakshmana Swamy in the 1950s, and more recently it has happened to Mathru Sri Sarada. This is sometimes called 'going into *samadhi*' but this is something of a misnomer. Ramana Maharshi said "Holding on to reality is *samadhi*".[4] If one accepts this definition then the *jnani* is always in *samadhi*; he never enters or leaves it. Sri Lakshmana's experience of the Self from 1950–53, when he spent most of his time 'in *samadhi*', that is, without outer awareness, was identical to his experience of the Self both before and after this period.

*Swamy*: There are several kinds of *samadhi*, but usually three kinds are spoken about. The lowest level, *savikalpa samadhi*, is only an advanced stage of concentration. The mind can hold on to an object of thought for long periods without distraction, but such periods always end when thoughts arise that distract one's attention from the object one is meditating on. This type of concentration is the lowest form of *samadhi*.

If one can reach a state where there are no thoughts at all, then this may also be called *samadhi*. If one can remain without thoughts for a long time then the mind will automatically subside into the Self and one will experience the bliss of the Self. This is not the true experience of the Self because there is still an 'I' which is experiencing the bliss. The true experience of the Self comes when the mind dies. Then there is no experiencer, there is only Self alone.

The second stage of *samadhi* is called *kevala nirvikalpa samadhi*. In this stage the 'I' temporarily disappears and leaves the true experience of the Self. As the experience is only temporary it is not Self-realisation. The 'I' is liable to reappear at any time and resume its normal ego consciousness. It is like a bucket which has been dropped into a well. While it is under the surface, the water inside and outside the bucket form an inseparable whole, but when the rope pulls the bucket out, the bucket and the water it contains are separated from the well water. Similarly, the mind can subside and disappear into the Self, but when it rises again, the sense of separation, the individual self, rises along with it.

In *kevala nirvikalpa samadhi* all the sense organs have ceased to function and one is not capable of thought, perception or action. It is the state of the yogi and not the *jnani* because the mind has not

yet been destroyed. A yogi may stay in this state for years at a time, but until the mind has been finally destroyed one cannot call it realisation.

The final state is *sahaja nirvikalpa samadhi.* In this state the mind or 'I' has been permanently destroyed. It is the state of the *jnani.* The *jnani* knows without a shadow of doubt that his mind has ceased to exist and that only the Self remains. In the *sahaja* state the senses and body function normally, and so the *jnani* can appear to be like an ordinary person living and working in the world. Sarada spends a lot of her time playing and it is hard to convince people that she is really a *jnani.* Her playing is just an outer facade. In reality she is a *jnani,* permanently established in the *sahaja* state and, although few people will believe it, so far as her realisation is concerned, she is in the same state as Ramana Maharshi. You can find many yogis and swamis who have had some experience of the second state of *samadhi,* the trance-like *nirvikalpa samadhi,* but enlightened beings who have reached the *sahaja* state are very rare. You may travel all round the world looking for such people and you will be lucky if you find one or two.

**General advice**

*Question*: I feel fear in your presence. Why?
*Swamy*: Fear exists in the mind. So long as the mind exists there will be duality. So long as there is duality there will be fear.
*Question*: How to get rid of fear?
*Swamy*: Mentally hold on to the name and form of an enlightened one. If your concentration is good, the fear will subside.
*Question*: What is the root of fear?
*Swamy*: The root?
*Question*: The cause, what causes fear to arise?
*Swamy*: The mind.
*Question*: What is the mind?
*Swamy*: The ego.
*Question*: What is the ego?
*Swamy*: The 'I'-thought.
*Question*: What is the 'I'-thought?
*Swamy*: The primal thought which arises from the Heart before all other thoughts arise is the 'I'-thought. It identifies itself with the body and makes you think that you are a separate person with a



mind and a body. When the 'I'-thought goes back to its source, the Heart, and dies, then all fear dies along with it.
*Question*: How to make the 'I'-thought go back to its source?
*Swamy*: By the quest 'Who am I?'.
*Question*: I don't understand. What is this quest?
*Swamy*: Ask yourself 'Who am I?'. Dive within and look for this 'I' that is giving you all this trouble. If you do this earnestly enough you will experience the bliss of the Self.

The quest is the earnest search for the source of the 'I'-thought.
*Question*: I still don't understand. How is one to go about doing all this?
*Swamy*: If you don't understand or find it difficult, it will be enough if you hold on to the name and form of an enlightened one. Or just try to be without thoughts. If you can manage either of these then the grace of the Self will help you towards the goal.

---

*Question*: Both you and Ramana Maharshi realised the Self quickly and relatively easily. How did you receive so much grace so easily?
*Swamy*: We had both finished our course in previous lives. Because of this, realisation came quickly in this life.
*Question*: Is it not possible for everyone to receive grace like this? I have been meditating all my life, but I don't seem to have made much progress. In fact I feel that I have regressed in the last few years.
*Swamy*: It is your mind that is saying that you have not made any progress. The mind is not competent to judge these matters. It is the Guru's job to ascertain progress, not the devotee's.
*Question*: I understand this, but I am still dissatisfied with my apparent lack of progress. It seems that I have not received enough grace to make good progress.
*Swamy*: You are in no position to judge how much grace you have received. The Guru, the Lord who resides in the Heart of each devotee, watches your devotion and your progress and gives you grace in proportion to the effort you make. It is his job to keep track of your progress. Your job is to make the effort.
*Question*: What is the most effective effort?
*Swamy*: Effort should be directed towards giving up thoughts. When the Lord in your Heart sees this effort being made, then the

grace you are looking for will start to flow. Eventually, if you persevere, the Lord may grant you an effortless thought-free state. Effort alone cannot take you to this state; it only comes about through the operation of grace from the Lord within. If the Lord sees that you are earnest in your efforts to give up thoughts he may grant you this experience. But you should remember that this state is not the final state; it is only the stage before realisation. However, you cannot realise the Self unless the Lord has granted you this experience because the Guru can only destroy the ego when the devotee has firmly established himself in this state.

*Question*: So nothing can be done without grace?

*Swamy*: Grace is more important than effort, but effort is also essential since without it the grace will not start to flow.

---

*Swamy*: To make spiritual progress it is useful to moderate food, sleep and talk. With too much or too little food, the senses rebel and the mind is impossible to control. Buddha once joined a group of *sannyasis* who were starving themselves, and for a while he followed their practices. Eventually he became too weak to meditate and so he started to take food again. It was only after he started to take food that he realised the Self. One should always take the middle way and avoid all extremes of deprivation and indulgence.

Some devotees go on fasts for days at a time, but such extreme practices are not necessary for spiritual progress. The only fasting that is required is mental. Starve the mind of all thoughts and all other methods become redundant.

*Question*: Moderating one's food and conversation is relatively easy, but how does one control sleep? For the past few days I have been sleeping at least nine hours every day, but I am still finding it difficult to stay awake when I meditate. Is it bad to sleep so much?

*Swamy*: It is not harmful to sleep for a long time. By controlling one's sleep I mean that one should not sleep more than the minimum number of hours required to keep the body healthy and alert. The amount of sleep that is needed will vary from person to person.

If one falls asleep during meditation it is an indication that one is not meditating intensively enough. If concentration and earnestness are weak, then drowsiness sets in and there is a tendency to fall asleep. This is a natural process which many people experience. There is a critical level of effort; if one can reach this level then there



will be enough energy to stay awake, and meditation will proceed intensively even though the body and mind may be tired. If one can sustain this level of intense meditation throughout the day, then the amount of sleep one gets becomes irrelevant because the meditative current continues even while one is asleep.

---

*Swamy*: The effortless thought-free state is very difficult to attain. I have read Mahatma Gandhi's autobiography. In it he says that it took him 40 years of ceaseless effort to attain this state. Those devotees who are fortunate enough to have the company of a *jnani* can control their minds much more easily, but a great effort is still required.

Many books have been written on meditation and *Vedanta*, but reading such books will result in an increase rather than a decrease of thoughts. It is far better to seek the company of a *jnani*. The grace that flows from a *jnani* automatically stills the minds of those who are near him.

If you question a *jnani* he will give you an answer based on his experience of the Self. He will not need to quote *Vedantic* texts. His experience of the Self will be sufficient to answer all spiritual problems.

---

*Swamy*: The thought "I want to realise the Self in this lifetime" is an obstacle to realisation. You are the Self now. Imagining that the Self is something that can be discovered in the future is a mental activity which keeps attention away from the Self. Hold on to the Self from moment to moment and don't concern yourself with anything else.

---

*Swamy*: Humbleness has to be there in a *sadhaka* [spiritual seeker]. Be humble. Have faith. Have faith in the Guru and have faith in yourself. Have faith because the Self is beyond words and beyond the mind. It is indestructible; even an atom bomb cannot destroy the Self. It is all-pervading and beyond the categories of birth and death. There is only the Self and nothing else. There is nothing apart from it. It is one without a second.

To know the Self is the only worthy knowledge. To experience

the Self as it really is it is essential that the mind be kept still, by any means. For spiritual practice you only have to remain without thoughts. This is not for the realisation of the Self, because the Self is ever-realised. Be without thoughts, be still, and you will find out what you really are.

The best way of getting rid of all thoughts is by holding on to the 'I'-thought. It is like a string which threads all the other thoughts together. If you eliminate the 'I'-thought, then all other thoughts are eliminated. If you keep out all other thoughts and hold on to the 'I'-thought alone you will find that the Self within will start to pull the 'I' back to its source, the Heart.

This is as far as the devotee can go by himself. No further progress can be made without the grace of the Guru. Guru, grace and Self are all the same. They are all within you and everywhere around you. When you reach these states the grace of the Guru will take over and help you towards the goal.

*References*:

[1] *The Path of Sri Ramana, Part I*, p. 157

[2] *Maharshi's Gospel*, p. 87

[3] *Upadesa Saram*, vv. 17,18,19. Taken from *The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*, p. 85

[4] *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, p. 357

# PART THREE
# Mathru Sri Sarada: Life

"My congratulations to my favourite daughter, Mathru Sri Sarada, who in my presence on the 18th of December, 1978, realised the Self Supreme which is eternal peace and bliss. There is no doubt that good devotees will be benefited by this book which contains her life and teachings."

Sri Lakshmana Swamy,
written June 1982

"It is difficult for people to recognise Sarada as an enlightened one because people can only see her personality. They cannot see that she is the impersonal Self. She is not interested in name and fame and she is not interested in this book about her. I made her talk about her experiences because I knew that good devotees would be benefited by reading such an account. One may read the *Vedas* from beginning to end but one will not find such a detailed account as this: an account of the experiences of a devotee who surrendered everything and realised the Self. It is rare to find such a Self-realised one."

Sri Lakshmana Swamy,
spoken comment, July, 1982

# 9
# CHILDHOOD

While he was still at school in Gudur Lakshmana was friendly with a brahmin boy called Ramanadham. They were classmates all the way through school, they played together, and Ramanadham occasionally spent the night in Lakshmana's house. Sometimes they even practised *pranayama* together in the place where Swamy had his first experience of the Self. After their school and college days were over they parted company for a while. Lakshmana went to stay with Ramana Maharshi at Arunachala while Ramanadham went into business as a mica merchant. In 1949 Ramanadham married a girl called Bhanumathy and they settled down together in Gudur.

Ramanadham was an ardent devotee of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. As a succession of children were born into his family in the 1950s and '60s three of them were given names connected with the two Gurus. Swarna was born in 1954, Bala in 1956, Sarada (the name of Sri Ramakrishna's wife) in 1959, Ramakrishna in 1961, Narendra (Swami Vivekananda's original name) in 1965, and Chandrasekhar in 1967.

When Ramanadham heard that his old school friend had become a great yogi and had returned to live in Gudur he naturally felt an urge to go and see him. Although he was primarily devoted to Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, each year he joined the thousands of other devotees on Sivaratri day and had *darshan* of his old friend.

When a daughter was born to Bhanumathy and Ramanadham in 1959 both parents were still devotees of Sri Ramakrishna. Since Bhanumathy had recently had a dream in which Sarada, Sri Ramakrishna's wife, had visited her and sat on her bed, she decided to call her new daughter Sarada.

At first Sarada was a healthy light-skinned girl, but her good health and colouring lasted only a few months. When she was three months old she caught chicken pox, and soon afterwards an ear infection which only disappeared after she had been given 60 injections of penicillin. A few months later she developed a large

tumour on her back which needed to be operated on. These early setbacks to her health had long-term effects; her skin darkened appreciably and for many years afterwards her body was extremely weak.

When she reached school age her parents sent her to an English-medium convent school in Gudur.* Sarada had little interest in attending school and she often played truant. Her parents were unaware of this for several weeks because Sarada made a good pretence of attending school; she would leave home in the morning, spend most of the day sitting under a tree, and only return home when the school had closed in the evening. When her truancy was finally brought to her parents' attention they withdrew Sarada from the school and sent her instead to a Telugu-medium school. The main merit of this new school was that they could see it from their house; its location enabled them to watch Sarada going to school, ensuring that there was no further possibility of truancy.

Sarada had no religious inclinations at all during her childhood but she did have a curiously ascetic nature. She had an aversion to wearing good clothes and she had little or no interest in the food that was given to her. When she was taken shopping to buy clothes she would always prefer to buy cheap, coarse material; if her clothes became torn she would prefer to pin them together rather than have them properly mended. These habits were a source of embarrassment to her family. Her dark skin (the rest of her family were light-skinned) and her cheap clothes led many people to believe that she was a servant rather than a member of the family. Sarada didn't care what impression she made on people; she was unperturbed by her parents' embarrassment, and equally unaffected by the people who looked down on her because of her appearance. Her indifference even extended to her diet since she cannot ever remember having any interest in food:

> I have never been interested in food. Before realisation I happily ate whatever was put in front of me. When I was a small girl at home my brothers were always raiding the kitchen to see what they could find. They were so greedy that my mother used to lock up everything that was edible. Even so, my brothers found the key and continued to raid the kitchen. I was never interested in food so I never joined them. I never had any clothes *vasanas* or food *vasanas*.

* Prosperous Indian families often send their children to private schools in which all the lessons are taught in English. They are known as English-medium schools. The free state schools give all their lessons in the local vernacular language.



Although she was indifferent to food and clothes her temperament was far from placid. She was always getting into heated arguments with her brothers and sisters. In the inevitable fights that ensued, she would compensate for her smallness and weakness by fighting ferociously. On many occasions she drew blood by scratching her opponents with her fingernails.

As she grew older she developed a very generous disposition which sometimes led her to take things from her parents' house and give them away to poor people in need. When she was about ten years old there was a girl of her own age who was working in the house as a servant. The girl's mother had also worked for her parents but she had stopped when she caught TB. Sarada used to feel sorry for this girl and often helped her with her chores. When her mother was absent from the house Sarada would take rice and dhal secretly from the storeroom and give them to the girl to take home to her mother. Another woman who worked in the house used to buy rice from Sarada's family; it was one of Sarada's jobs to weigh it out for her. Sarada thought that this woman was also in need of assistance. If she asked for and paid for 1 kg. Sarada would give her 2½-3 kgs. and ask her not to tell anyone about it. Sarada says that she told these people, "You are poor and I don't want you to suffer. We have many things, so you must take some of them." Her generosity was not restricted to her family's possessions; she frequently gave her own away. When relatives and friends gave her 50 paise or a rupee as pocket money—something which happened quite often—she would usually give the money away to the poor people in the neighbourhood.

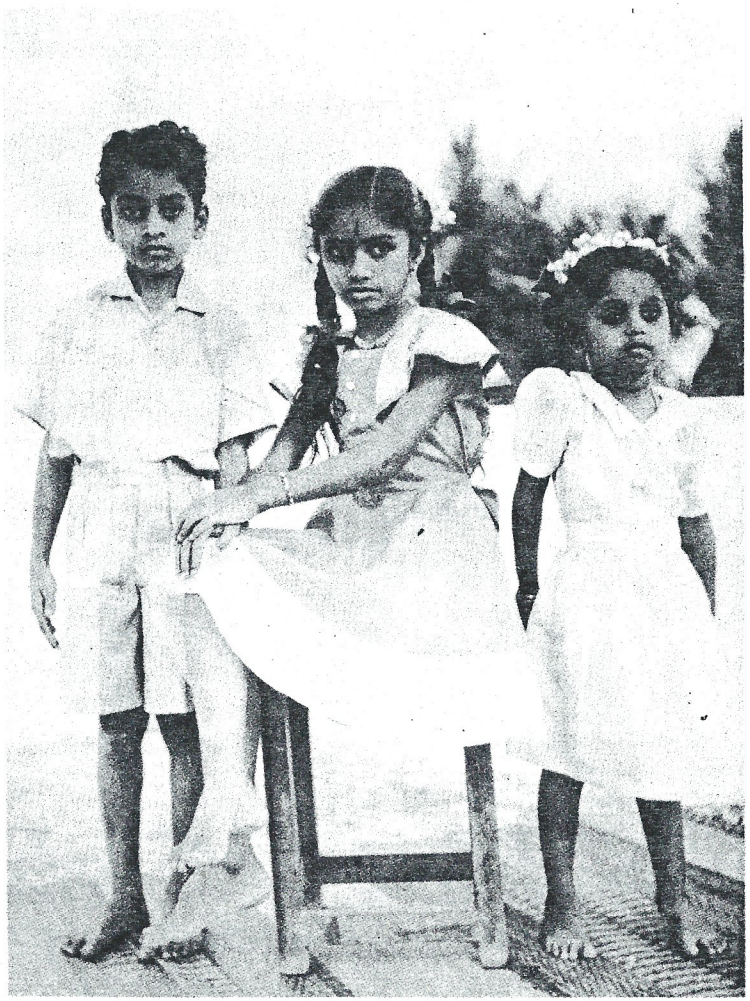
After finishing her primary education Sarada went to the Z.P. Girls High School in Gudur where she seems to have done tolerably well. During her 7th standard year Lakshmana Swamy came out of his long period of isolation and started to give weekly *darshans*. It took some time for the news to reach Sarada's parents and it was not until over a year later, at the beginning of 1974, that they started to see Swamy regularly. It only took a few visits for both of them to

experience Swamy's power and grace. After attending the *darshans* for a few weeks they both became committed devotees. Later that year Sarada's mother first started cooking Swamy's meals for him, a practice that she has kept up ever since.

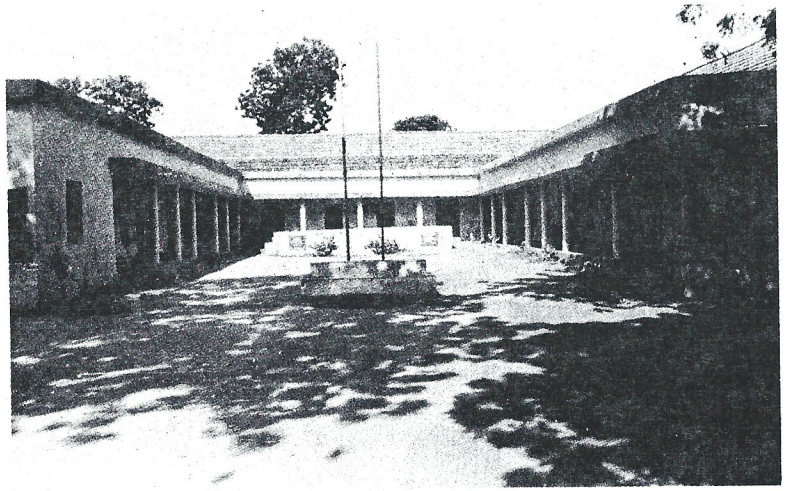
Bhanumathy had taken Sarada to see Swamy on Sivaratri day 1960, when she was only a three-month-old baby. In the following years she was left at home and she didn't visit the ashram again until 1974. In February of that year, on Sivaratri day, Sarada joined the other members of her family on their annual visit to Swamy. Because of the large numbers of people who were present Swamy did not notice her, but despite this he made a great impression on her. Sarada recalls that when she looked at him for the first time she thought that he was God in human form, but at the same time she was distinctly afraid of him because she felt that he had the capacity to read all her thoughts. She was also afraid because she thought that he had the power to burn her to ashes, merely by looking at her; stories of sages who have this power are common in Indian mythology. This fear was to persist for some time; on many of her subsequent visits she would sit near the rear of the assembly and try to hide her face behind the back of the person in front of her.

Her next visit was in April when she attended one of the weekly Sunday *darshans* in the Ramana Mandir. By this time Swamy was beginning to attract her and she made a resolution that if she passed her school exams she would come to visit him every week. She took the exams, her second attempt at 7th standard, shortly afterwards. As she was writing her papers she was constantly repeating the name of Lakshmana. She says that as her *japa* became more intense, the feeling grew that it was not she who was writing the exams but Lakshmana himself.

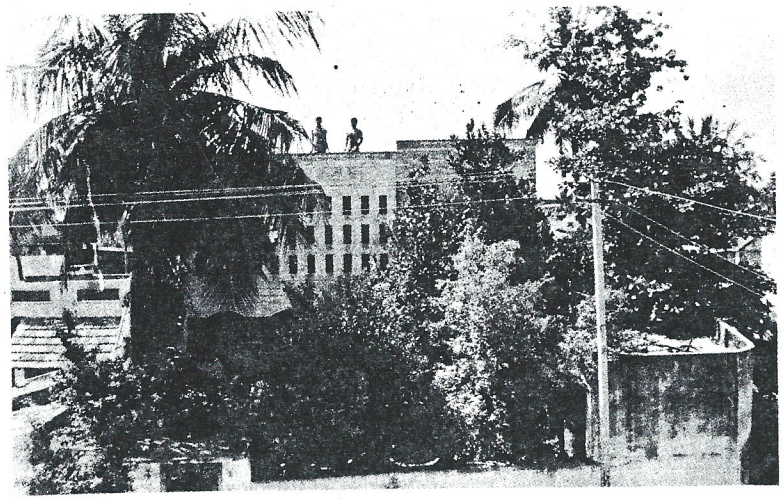
When the results were announced, on the anniversary of Ramana Maharshi's *Mahanirvana* day, Sarada discovered that she had easily passed the exams. Since this day was always celebrated at Lakshmana Ashram she was able to go there that evening and have *darshan* of Swamy. She kept her promise about seeing Swamy if she passed the exams; from that day on she started to come every week. Swamy says that he cannot remember when he first noticed Sarada, but Sarada is sure that it was on one of the Sunday *darshans* a few weeks later. Sarada says that from that point on, whenever he looked at her, his face would break out into a smile and a laugh. With this encouraging sign she got the impression that he liked her.



Sarada aged six on the right; Swarna, her sister in the middle, and Bala, her brother on the left.



Part of the Z. P. Girls' High School in Gudur. Sarada spent her 7th and 8th standard years in this building. Sri Lakshmana Swamy also attended this school in the 1930s and 40s. In those days there were no separate schools for boys and girls.



The front view of Sarada's house in Gudur.



Because the *Mahanirvana* day fell on a Saturday that year, she was able to make her first Sunday visit to Swamy the following day. That night she dreamt about Swamy for the first time. In the dream she was sitting with her family and Swamy under a kasturi tree outside their house. Leaf-plates were distributed and Sarada's mother served everyone with a helping of curd-rice. A pink kasturi flower fell on Sarada's food and caused it to have a bitter taste. She decided not to eat the food and instead gazed silently at Swamy. Swamy finally asked her why she was not eating and Sarada replied, "This flower fell on my plate. It has given a bitter taste to the food. How can I eat it?" Swamy removed the flower and asked her to carry on eating. Sarada started to eat but the bitterness was still there. However, she forced herself to finish the food because Swamy had asked her to do it; she also felt obliged to eat it because it became his *prasad* as soon as he touched the flower. Sarada woke up shortly afterwards but she could make no sense of the dream. Years later, when she was having major problems with her *sadhana*, she decided that the dream symbolised all the bitterness she would have to endure in her turbulent relationship with Swamy and his mother. She decided that Swamy had taken away the worst of the bitterness by removing the flower (he later saved her from death on three occasions) but he still compelled her to eat all the bitter food that was put in front of her.

The following Sunday, after her next *darshan*, she dreamt of him again. In this dream Swamy stood under a ponna tree outside Sarada's house and called to her. When Sarada appeared Swamy asked her to bring him some food. Sarada brought him some curd-rice and put it into his mouth with her own hands. She then asked Swamy if he would like to come into the house, but Swamy declined, saying that he was no longer hungry. As he was walking away from the tree Sarada woke up. These Sunday dreams became a regular feature of Sarada's life. Each Sunday afternoon she would attend the public *darshan*, and every Sunday night she would have a dream of Swamy.

A few weeks later, at one of the Sunday *darshans*, Swamy told everyone the story of how he had fallen out of the tree in his garden. In the late 1960s it suddenly struck him that he was destined to fall out of a drumstick tree in his garden. Each time he looked at the tree, it seemed to be inviting him to climb it and fall down. He resisted the invitation for a week, but on the seventh day he suc-

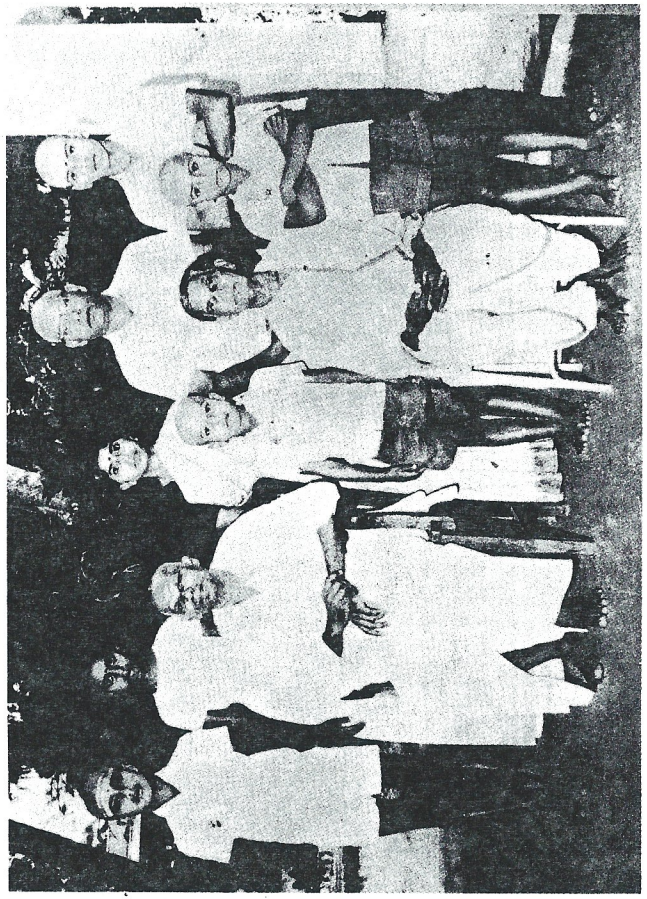
cumbed to its call and decided to climb the tree. There were three drumsticks near the top of the tree; two of them he picked quite easily, but the third was just out of his reach. He stood on a branch and, using both hands, he attempted to pick it with the aid of a metal hook. Before he could reach it the branch he was standing on broke away from the trunk of the tree. He should have dropped straight down on to some rocks and thorns, but as he started to fall, some power pushed him away from the tree and he landed in a relatively safe spot. Even so, he landed very heavily and dislocated his elbow. As the pain first registered he called out "Bhagavan! Bhagavan!".

When he discovered that his elbow was out of joint he put it back himself. He then shook it to see if he had put it back in the right place, but the bone came out again. He put it back a second time and then kept the arm still. Later that day his mother brought a doctor from Gudur to inspect the arm. The doctor, one of his college classmates, examined the joint and congratulated him on his bonesetting expertise. He then bandaged the elbow to keep the bones securely in place.

The fall had also damaged his hip, but at the time he was more concerned with the displaced bone. The hip pain was to continue for many years, severely restricting his ability to walk long distances.

The day after she heard this story, Sarada was lighting a fire in her house when a glowing ember jumped from a stick she was holding and fell down the front of her blouse. As she felt the pain she instantly remembered Swamy's story, and particularly how he had called out "Bhagavan! Bhagavan!" when he hit the ground. She made no attempt to dislodge the wood, she merely called out "*Hare* Lakshmana! *Hare* Lakshmana!". The ember should have obeyed the laws of gravity and either stayed where it was or moved further down inside her clothes; instead it jumped out of the front of her blouse and went back into the fire. When Sarada took her clothes off to inspect the damage she discovered that her skin was completely unmarked.

When Sarada had been attending the Sunday *darshans* for a few weeks she decided that it was time that she started to meditate. However, having no knowledge of meditation practices, she had no idea how to meditate or whom to meditate on. Swamy had been praising Ramana Maharshi during his weekly discourses and Sarada



Sarada's family with Swamy and Swamy's mother. The photo was taken during Sarada's first visit to Arunachala in 1974. Standing, left to right: Ramakrishna, Sarada, Bhanumathy, Ramanadham, Bala. Sitting, left to right: Swamy, Chandra, the Old Woman and Narendra. It is traditional for men in some parts of India to shave their heads when they go on a pilgrimage.

Arunachala, viewed from the south side.



was not sure whether she ought to meditate on the name and form of Sri Lakshmana or the name and form of Sri Ramana. One evening she decided to resolve the problem by closing her eyes and waiting to see which of the two competing forms appeared to her. She decided in advance that if either Sri Ramana's or Sri Lakshmana's form appeared she would take that form for meditation. She also thought that if either of the two forms appeared it would be a good indication of whom she should take as her Guru. She sat for half an hour, waiting to see what would happen, but neither form appeared in her mind. Then she tried a different approach and started to think of both Sri Ramana and Sri Lakshmana simultaneously. As she did so, the form of Swamy appeared before her in a bright clear light. Satisfied with the results of her experiment, she decided to meditate on Swamy's form and to take him as her Guru.

In the middle of October 1974, during the *Navaratri* festival, she and several other devotees accompanied Swamy on a pilgrimage to Arunachala. It was Sarada's first visit there and she was immediately impressed with the powerful presence of the mountain. Arunachala has the reputation for being a wish-fulfilling mountain, and Sarada's only wish at that moment was to devote herself full-time to meditation. She decided to tell Arunachala about her request while she was doing *pradakshina* of the mountain. The devotees who had accompanied Swamy, including Sarada, had decided to walk round the hill on Vijayadasami day; that year, this festival marked the 25th anniversary of the day when Swamy realised the Self. As Sarada walked slowly round the 13 km. road at the foot of the hill she kept repeating to herself that she didn't want to marry and that she wanted to devote her life to meditation instead.

Sarada spent five days at Sri Ramanasramam. While she was there she was particularly attracted to a nagamalli tree which stood outside the room where Ramana Maharshi had died. This tree is popularly known as a 'Siva *lingam*' tree because its pink flower resembles a room with a Siva *lingam* inside it. *Lingams* are vertical cylinders of stone with a rounded upper end; they are symbols of Siva and they are worshipped in the inner shrines of all Siva temples.

Soon after she returned to Gudur she dreamed that she was looking at one of these trees. It was located near her house and it had three flowers on it. One of the flowers was in poor condition so she gave it to the daughter of the woman on whose land the tree

had been planted. When she looked into the second flower she saw Siva standing behind the *lingam*, with Ramana Maharshi and Lakshmana Swamy on either side of him. She wondered why so few people believed in God when all they had to do was look inside this particular flower. The third flower only contained Siva, Swamy and the *lingam*. She took it home to show her mother, but her mother could only see an ordinary flower. Sarada asked her to look again, but her mother could still not see either Siva or Swamy. The dream ended abruptly as Sarada's mother, this time in her real physical form, hit her on the back and woke her up.

In the weeks that followed Sarada began to think of Swamy more and more. Her schoolwork began to suffer and her position in class slipped. When she was supposed to be reading her schoolbooks she would sometimes stare at them vacantly, inwardly repeating '*Hare* Lakshmana', and when she was supposed to be writing, she would often be writing '*Hare* Lakshmana' repeatedly on a blank piece of paper. She also used to daydream in class, creating imaginary scenes in which she and Swamy would be playing and laughing together. Her teachers soon discovered the reason for her deteriorating work, but instead of punishing her, they sympathised with her predicament. Devotion to God was apparently considered to be a good enough reason for not working, and it was only those girls who did badly through laziness who were ever punished.

One incident from her 8th standard year is worth relating since it strongly reinforced her devotion to Sri Lakshmana. All the girls had to be in class by 9.30 each morning. The school bell was rung at this time, and all those who arrived after it had been rung either had to pay a 50 paisa fine or spend an hour out in the hot sun cutting grass in the school grounds. The latter option was no easy way of avoiding school since the temperature at that hour was often in the upper 90s. On one morning it was particularly important that Sarada arrive on time since there was an important class test scheduled for the first period. Sitting at home she did not realise how late it was, and she failed to notice the time until it was 9.45. She then picked up her books and raced through the streets of Gudur repeating "*Hare* Lakshmana" all the time in the hope that Swamy could somehow make the time go more slowly. Swamy exceeded her wildest expectations, for when she finally reached the school, the school clock was registering 9.30 and the bell had not even been rung. Later that morning it was discovered that the school clock



was 20 minutes slow. Sarada says that this was the only time in her school career that the clock suddenly malfunctioned in this way. She recalls that the incident deeply impressed her at the time and that it strengthened her faith in Swamy's omniscience and omnipotence.

# 10

# FIRST INSTRUCTIONS

For the first year of her spiritual career, except on special occasions, Sarada was only allowed to see Swamy once a week. In March 1975 her ration was increased when she and her sister were given permission to attend a special *darshan* which took place every Saturday evening in Swamy's house. After she and her sister had been attending the *darshans* for four weeks they had a heated argument in their house which reduced Sarada to tears. The subject was a trivial domestic matter but Sarada says that the argument was an important milestone in her life: from that day on her feeling of disgust towards the mundane events of everyday life increased, and a strong desire to be detached from all human affairs started to grow in her. At the conclusion of the argument Sarada wrote a letter to Swamy.

> *Om Namo Bhagavate Sri Ramanaya. Om Namo Bhagavate Sri Lakshmanaye.** Sri Lakshmana Swamy. There is no happiness in this world. In nothing is there any happiness. I should not be attached to anything. Bhagavan, you are my only refuge. I have no support except you. I am surrendering to you. You are my father, mother and Guru, and if you do not exist, then I do not exist either. I am writing this letter in much agony; please show me your grace. I am not compelling you, excuse me, but you are my only refuge. I am giving my life to you, for you are everything to me. No one is loving me except you, and except for you no one is pitying me. I am surrendering to you. Lakshmana Bhagavan. Surrender, surrender, surrender.
>
> SARADA

Sri Lakshmana was impressed with the letter and he told his mother that Sarada's dispassion was very good. However, since it

**Om*, obeisance to Bhagavan Sri Ramana. *Om*, obeisance to Bhagavan Sri Lakshmana.



was not his practice to reply to devotees' letters, the letter went unanswered.

A week later, when Sarada's 8th standard school year ended, she wanted to celebrate the occasion by going to the ashram and having Swamy's *darshan*. Her mother though, would not permit her to go because she didn't want her to travel there alone. Sarada started to cry but her mother would not change her decision. Instead, her mother tried to console her by saying that she had bought some new clothes for her, but Sarada said that she didn't want new clothes, she wanted to go to the ashram. When her mother still refused to let her go, Sarada continued to cry and started to do *japa* of Swamy's name.

She was still crying when her brother Bala came in later that day. Bala had been to the ashram to take Swamy some food, and while he was there he had asked Swamy what would happen to all the members of his family in later life. Swamy decided that this was a good opportunity to test Sarada's devotion. He enumerated the destinies (completely fictitiously) of all the members of the family; when it came to Sarada's turn he said that she was probably destined to get married. Bala revealed all this to his mother, but Sarada didn't hear Swamy's prediction because she was too preoccupied with her crying and her *japa*.

The next morning her mother told her that she should not ask about going to the ashram again because Swamy had said that she was probably destined to get married and lead a normal family life. In such circumstances she could hardly hope to become a full-time devotee. Sarada started to cry again when she heard what Swamy thought about her future. Her mother tried to alleviate her distress by saying that she would ask Swamy if one could change one's *prarabdha* (destiny) by thinking of him all the time.

Swamy delivered his verdict at the next *darshan*. When Sarada's mother asked him the question, he looked at Sarada, smiled and said "Yes". As Sarada was telling me this story she remarked that Swamy had tested her in this way in order to increase her desire for the spiritual life. He knew that she had a strong aversion to marriage; by telling her that that was her destiny, he was in fact encouraging her to avoid such a fate by thinking more about him.

At the end of that month Sarada asked Swamy if it would be possible for her to stay in the ashram full-time. She told Swamy that her only wish was to stay with him, that she had no plans to

marry, and that her father would support her during her stay. Her sister Swarna, who also attended the *darshan*, tried to point out the problems of leading such a life. She turned to Swamy and said: "If people have many worldly desires, won't it be difficult for them to follow the spiritual path? If women try to live alone and meditate, men will cause them many problems." Swamy replied, "If such people live in an ashram there will be no problem". Swamy then turned to Sarada and said that she was welcome to come and stay in the ashram. He had already recognised that she was an advanced devotee who was capable of realising the Self and he wanted to encourage her to spend as much time as possible at the ashram. Unfortunately, it was not physically possible for Sarada to take up the offer immediately. There was no accommodation at the ashram and no facilities for resident devotees. After thinking the matter over Sarada decided to go back to school, start her 9th standard year and take up Swamy's offer later.

On the Saturday following her request to stay in the ashram, she came to the usual Saturday *darshan* with two of her brothers. When Swamy failed to appear for the *darshan* her brothers went home. Sarada stayed at the ashram became she had decided that she was not going to leave without seeing Swamy. When night came and Swamy had still not appeared she decided that she would sleep in the mandir and attempt to see him the following morning when one of her family would be bringing him his morning food. During the evening she meditated for several hours on Swamy's name and form before finally falling asleep.

The next morning Bala brought the food and Sarada went into the house with him to see Swamy. Sri Lakshmana knew that she had spent the night in the mandir and he had deliberately cancelled the *darshan* the previous evening as a test to see how strong her devotion was. He revealed none of this to Sarada at the time. When she told him that she had come the previous night he pretended to be surprised and told her that if he had known that she had been waiting there all night he would have given her *darshan*.

Sarada then produced a notebook and asked Swamy to write some instructions for meditation in it. Sri Lakshmana wrote the following words of advice, most of which were taken from Sankara:

> The body is the temple of the Self, and God, who is shining in the Heart, one without a second, has to be meditated on.



> The body is impure, the Self is perfect, the body is only an impurity, it is not the Self.
>
> Conquering anger, greed and lust, giving up duality and recognising the Self which is beyond the senses: that is liberation.
>
> *Brahman* is real, the world is an illusion; the *jiva* is not separate from *Brahman*.
>
> The 'I' is not separate from the Self. Who recognises this is a *jivanmukta* [one who is liberated while still alive].
>
> Do not believe that the world and your body are real and fall into *samsara*. To avoid this do meditation on the Self.
>
> You are not the body; you are not the ego; so who are you? Follow the quest 'Who am I?', dive into the Heart and realise the Self.

This was the first time that Sarada had managed to speak to Swamy about her meditation. After he had written the words of advice in her book she was too shy to say anything more, so she prostrated and left.

The following day she went to Nellore to visit some relatives who lived there. It was during the school's summer holidays so she was able to stay for several days. On the seventh day of her visit Swamy appeared to her in a dream and said: "If you wish to realise the Self, don't leave me. Until you control your mind, be with me." The dream re-established Sarada's priorities and she returned to her parents' house the following morning. When she next saw Swamy she asked for special *darshans* every Saturday; Swamy happily granted her request.

Three weeks later, on the 30th of May, Sarada brought Swamy his midday meal. As she was prostrating before him, Swamy gave her a gracious smile that stilled her mind and caused it to sink temporarily into the Heart. Sarada says that for a brief moment she thought that she was experiencing the bliss of the Self. This single smile had such a powerful effect on her that for some time she thought that looking at Swamy's smile alone would be sufficient to realise the Self. As Sarada was relating this incident on the veranda of Swamy's house, Swamy commented that he too had had a similar experience with Ramana Maharshi in 1949. He said that as he stood before him, Sri Ramana's smile penetrated his Heart, and he too felt that the smile alone could give him Self-realisation.

When she had recovered from the effect of Swamy's smile she approached him and asked him the following question: "I want to do *tapas* and meditation but there are many difficulties involved. Is it possible for a girl to follow this path?"

Sri Lakshmana replied, "What do you understand by the word *tapas*?". Sarada was unable to give an answer. After she had remained silent for some time Swamy answered the question himself.

"Whether one is a man or a woman one can do *tapas*. If one keeps the mind in the Heart, that is *tapas*. If you are attracted to my name and form you can do *japa* of my name. Alternatively, you can follow the quest 'Who am I?'."

Sarada had already been repeating Sri Lakshmana's name for two months, but this was the first time that she had received permission to do so. She was delighted to have received this official sanction, and she resolved to increase her efforts to keep Swamy's name always in her mind.

Two days later Sarada came to the ashram to attend one of the usual Sunday evening discourses in the Ramana Mandir. During the course of his talk Swamy incidentally mentioned that though it was good to touch the feet of those who had realised the Self, most enlightened people would not allow it.*

Sarada decided that since Swamy had said that touching his feet was beneficial, she would risk his anger and try to do it herself as soon as possible. Her opportunity came the following Wednesday during the evening *darshan* in his house. As she prostrated before him she reached out her hand and touched his feet. Swamy seemed unconcerned by her act. He merely looked at her and said, "You cannot touch my feet because I am not the body; the feet are in the Heart".

As Swamy was looking at her he discerned that she had a desire to receive a picture of him from his own hands. Looking at the assembled devotees he asked if any of them would like a picture of him. Sarada was too afraid to ask, but one of the other devotees said that he would like one. Swamy, knowing that it was Sarada

* Sarada once told me that Swamy had had at least one bad experience of this himself. It seems that during one of the *darshans* in his house a devotee had rushed forward and grabbed both of Swamy's big toes simultaneously. The devotee appeared to enter a blissful, peaceful state, but Swamy's body went cold all over, and it took him several hours to recover from the weakness that the touching had caused.

Sarada, aged 15, taken soon after she first came to Swamy.

Swamy, as he was 11 years ago when Sarada first came to see him.



who really wanted the picture, ignored the other devotee's request, picked up a picture which was next to him, and gave it to Sarada.

This unexpected but welcome present restored a little of Sarada's courage and she asked a question about her meditation. She said that in the first stage of meditation she was encountering a thought-free void, but after some time Swamy's name and form would appear in the void. She then asked Swamy what she should do when the name and form appeared. Swamy told her, "If you are meditating on my name and form, just hold onto the image. That is enough."

That night she had a dream in which she came to the ashram and stood crying in front of Swamy's gate. Swamy came out to see what was going on and Sarada says that when he saw her he welcomed her like a father calling his own daughter. He sat on the platform under the tree near his gate and asked Sarada to sit on his lap. Sarada sat on his knee while Swamy related to her the whole history of Arunachala. When he had finished his narrative he told Sarada that she could now touch his feet if she wanted to. He said, "You are my child. Last night I only told you not to touch my feet because all the other devotees would want to do it as well." Sarada then touched his feet and the dream ended.

# 11

# BANNED FROM THE ASHRAM

On the 8th, 9th and 10th of June Sarada managed to see Swamy every evening between 6 and 7 p.m.. Her devotion was reaching a stage where she wanted to be with Swamy all the time; she was no longer content with seeing him for an hour at a time. Swamy was aware of this and when Bala brought his food on the 11th, Swamy asked him to request Sarada's father to come and see him. When Ramanadham came Swamy told him that Sarada should be allowed to come whenever she wished because she was always thinking of him and because she had a desire to stay permanently in his presence. Ramanadham had no objection to this. Sarada was, of course, delighted when he told her the news. She decided to take advantage of her new freedom by going out to the ashram that evening in the company of Narendra, one of her younger brothers.

When Swamy saw her later that day he questioned her about her decision to devote herself full-time to meditation. He said, "All girls of your age are thinking about getting married. Why are you so obsessed with God?" Sarada was unable to account for her devotion and she could only reply, rather feebly, that she didn't like marriage.

When the *darshan* was over Sarada and Narendra decided to sleep in the mandir so that they could see Swamy again the following morning. Sarada was planning to see him when his morning food arrived, but at 5 a.m. she awoke with such an uncontrollable urge to see him that she decided to break into his compound to see if she could catch a glimpse of him. The main gate was locked, but with Narendra's help she had little difficulty in climbing over the wall that was next to it. Sarada and Narendra did *pradakshina* of the house as quietly as they could and then stood silently in front of Swamy's door. Suddenly the door opened and Sarada saw Swamy standing in his room. She had taken great care not to make any noise while she was outside the house and she initially thought that Swamy's awareness of her presence was yet another indication of his omniscience. When she told Swamy that she was convinced that he knew everything he replied, "I knew you were there because you



were thinking of me very strongly. If anyone thinks of me I am aware of it, and I think of them. That is devotion."

Swamy then asked her how she had managed to get in since he knew that the gate was locked. Sarada told him how she had jumped over the wall and added that she had not been able to wait until the gate was opened because her mind was obsessed with the thought of him. Swamy understood her predicament and made no complaint about her breaking in at such an early hour. He told her that if she ever wanted to see him when the gate was locked she only had to knock on the gate and he would happily come out and open it for her. Sarada then admitted to him that the main reason she had decided to come in secretly was because she didn't want to have a quarrel with Swamy's mother.

Swamy's mother lived in a small house about 150 yards from Swamy's compound. For many years she had taken on herself the responsiblity of deciding who could and could not see Swamy. Because she plays a prominent role in the events that are about to be related, it will be useful at this point to give a little background information about her.

Throughout the 1950s and '60s, when Swamy was living in isolation, his mother supplied him with food. In the 1970s, when Swamy started to see devotees regularly, she also assumed the role of ashram manager, deciding which devotees could see him and which could not. From 1974 onwards Sarada's mother supplied Swamy with his food. This curtailed his mother's role, effectively restricting it to the management of devotees. Even before Sarada came to the ashram Swamy had been unhappy with the way in which she was doing the job. She would frequently force him to give *darshan* at inconvenient hours to people he did not want to see, and equally frequently she would deprive people that he did want to see of access to him. When Sarada started to see Swamy regularly the arguments over accessibility degenerated into open warfare and Swamy's mother did everything in her power to drive Sarada from the ashram.

When I was collecting material for this section of the book Swamy always referred to his mother as 'the Old Woman' and to his brother as 'the Old Woman's son'. When I asked him how I should refer to them in this book he said that I should use these names only. These titles are not wholly the result of the arguments he had with them; Swamy says that he has no attachment to blood relatives, and that

only those who have devotion can be considered to be related to him.

Sarada returned to the mandir after the early morning *darshan*. After seeing Swamy again at 7.30 when his food was brought to him, she returned to her house in Gudur. She told her family about the events of that morning, and when Bala brought Swamy's lunch to him he incidentally mentioned to the Old Woman that Sarada had been to see Swamy earlier that day. The Old Woman was extremely annoyed that Sarada had gone to see Swamy without seeing her first, but she gave no indication of it at the time. She saved her anger for later in the day.

Sarada herself came back at 11.30 but Swamy said that he was not able to see her. Instead he gave her a smile and told her to come back at 5.30 that afternoon. Sarada decided to spend the intervening hours in the mandir, but at 4.45, unable to restrain herself any longer, she went to Swamy's gate and asked to be let in. The Old Woman, still visibly angry with her because she had broken in earlier in the day, initially refused to open the gate until the appointed hour of 5.30. She then turned to Sarada's younger brothers, Narendra and Chandra, who were also waiting outside the gate, and said very aggressively, "Why is she breaking in like this? Is she mad?" Narendra and Chandra could both see how angry she was and this deterred them from giving a reply. The Old Woman was obviously spoiling for a fight, but when she saw that she couldn't provoke an argument she finally relented and opened the gate for them.

Sarada stayed with Swamy until 8 p.m. During the course of the evening Narendra left and Ramakrishna, another of her brothers, came in. At 8 p.m., the time when she would normally be expected to leave, Sarada asked Swamy if she could stay and watch him eat. Swamy agreed. Soon afterwards the Old Woman sent a man to the house with a message that everyone should leave as it was getting late. However, he was too scared to deliver the message and this enabled Sarada to stay for another hour.

As they were finally leaving the house the messenger warned Sarada that the Old Woman was still angry with her and that she would take the first opportunity that came up to pick a fight with her. No sooner had the warning been given than the Old Woman appeared. The man's prediction was soon fulfilled. As the three children stood trembling before her she abused them, told them to



collect their belongings, leave the ashram and not come back. Sarada told her that she wanted to sleep in the mandir and that Swamy had given her permission to do so, but the Old Woman would not allow it. After a few minutes she was joined by her son and they both started criticising the three of them for staying so late. Sarada finally resigned herself to walking home and she asked the Old Woman if she could borrow a torch. She pointed out that it was a three kilometre walk to their house and that without a torch her youngest brother, who was only eight years old, would be afraid. The Old Woman refused and told them to walk home in the dark. Sarada herself was not afraid of the walk; she was more afraid of what her father would say if she came home late at night with her two younger brothers. She tried again to get the Old Woman's permission to stay, but after arguing with her for nearly an hour she gave up and started to walk home.

The three of them did not finally reach their house until 11 p.m. When they arrived they found that it was locked up and that their parents were both asleep. Their mother eventually opened the door to them, and soon afterwards their father appeared, demanding to know why they had come home so late. Sarada explained that although Swamy had given them permission to stay in the mandir, the Old Woman and her son had refused to allow them to sleep on the ashram premises.

Her father was furious that his children had been thrown out of the ashram at such a late hour of the night and he told them that they would not be allowed to go there again. He was so angry that he banned the whole family from going anywhere near the ashram in future. He concluded his tirade by saying, "Swamy is everywhere. He is also in this house. Stay here and meditate." Sarada spent the whole night crying at the thought of being separated from Swamy, but her father refused to change his decision. The next morning he took Swamy his food and informed him that none of his family would be coming to the ashram again. On returning home he decorated a picture of Swamy and, after telling everyone to meditate on the picture, he repeated his injunction that they should not go to the ashram.

Ramanadham exempted Bala from this rule. The family still intended to supply Swamy with food, and Bala was given permission to take it to the ashram. On the first morning of this new arrangement Sarada managed to conceal a letter in a newspaper which was

to be delivered along with the food. The letter said, "Your mother has argued with me and my father will not allow me to come. Tell my father to allow me to come to the ashram." Swamy found and read the letter while Bala was still in the house. Before he left Swamy told him to send Sarada to see him the next day.

The next morning Sarada's menstrual period started. Her family were orthodox brahmins and this meant that she had to undergo a period of quarantine at home. Because women in this condition traditionally neither go to temples nor visit holy men, it was not possible for Sarada to see Swamy that day. Since Sarada was unable to go herself, her mother was sent along instead in case Swamy had an important message to deliver.

Swamy delivered a short discourse that day; during his talk he said that Sarada's mind was the innocent mind of a five-year-old. He also said that her mind was pure and that she had no evil thoughts. Sarada's mother and the Old Woman both attended this talk; Swamy was hoping that the Old Woman would apologise and resolve her differences with the family.

The Old Woman was untouched by his talk. This left Swamy with no option but to tackle Ramanadham directly in an attempt to persuade him to lift his ban on the family visiting the ashram. On the following day, when Ramanadham brought him his food, Swamy told him that it was not necessary to be angry with either him or his mother. He said, "Anyone should be able to see me. I am like the Ganges, accessible to all." Even after this request from Swamy, Ramanadham was still unwilling to let his family come while there was still the possibility that they would be abused and insulted by the Old Woman. After politely listening to Swamy, he insisted that the ban would remain in force. When Sarada heard the news she spent the whole evening crying on her bed.

The following day, the 16th of June, was the first day of the school year and Sarada was sent to school to start her 9th standard year. Her separation from Swamy was causing acute mental, emotional and spiritual agony and she had reached the point where the separation was so unendurable that she decided that if she was not able to see Swamy by the following day she would commit suicide.

Her parents already suspected that Sarada might be capable of taking her life because of her love for Swamy, but they failed to understand that by keeping her away from him they were increasing rather than decreasing the risk. A few days before, one of Swamy's



devotees had seen Sarada playing rather aimlessly behind the mandir. Her eccentric behaviour had convinced him that she was slightly mad. He knew that her love for Swamy had become an obsession and he thought that she might end up committing suicide because of her love for Swamy. He told her parents about his theory and suggested that they keep her away from the ashram. Her parents, already concerned over Sarada's obsessive love for Swamy, were inclined to believe his story. They thought that by keeping her at home they could reduce the risk of suicide, but they had completely misjudged the situation. Sarada was unable to live without seeing Swamy, and the longer her parents kept her away from him, the more inclined Sarada was to end her life.

None of the family had much sympathy with her at the time because they all felt that she was the cause of their exile from the ashram. When Sarada came home after her first day at school her mother was in a bad mood. She scolded Sarada, saying, "Why did you have to jump that wall? Now we all have to suffer for your behaviour." Her mother then started beating her with a stick and Sarada spent yet another evening crying on her bed.

The following morning she again begged her father for permission to visit Swamy, but the request was again refused. She did not tell her parents that she intended to kill herself that day if she was not allowed to see Swamy; she feared that this would make them even less willing to allow her to go to the ashram again.

That morning she wrote another letter to Swamy and concealed it in a plastic water can which was about to be taken out to him. She wrote:

> If I do not see you I shall not live. I wish to be with you always, every second. They are not allowing me to come to you. I want devotion only, and I am loving you as my own father. They are scolding me and beating me. This evening at 6 p.m. I am going away from home to die. Why do I have to live? I am living for you alone. If you want me to live you will have to come to my house and give me *darshan*. I shall take an overdose of 30 sleeping tablets if you have not come by 6 p.m.

The water can had two caps and Sarada managed to conceal the letter in the inner one. She was just in time. A few minutes later Bala took the water can, cycled out to the ashram with it, and placed it

in Swamy's kitchen. As he was unscrewing the cap he noticed that there was a note inside. He left it in the kitchen without reading it, but when he went home he told his mother that someone had concealed a letter to Swamy in the spout of the can. His mother immediately suspected that Sarada was the culprit and started to beat her again, shouting, "I beat you last night, but you are still doing your mischief!". Sarada tried to pretend that she had only written a *sloka* from the *Bhagavad Gita*, but her mother did not believe her. Fortunately, it was almost time for Sarada to go to school, so she had a good excuse to leave the house. Her mother was still intent on punishing her but she decided to postpone the punishment until Sarada came home. Sarada finally went off to school, but she paid no attention to her work. Instead, she spent the whole morning repeating the words '*Hare* Lakshmana, *Hare* Lakshmana'.

When Swamy read the note which Bala had left in his kitchen he knew that Sarada's threat was genuine. He also knew that he could only avert it by a personal visit. When Ramanadham brought him his lunch that day he immediately asked him what time Sarada normally returned home from school. Her father replied that she normally came home at about 5 p.m. Swamy then asked Ramanadham to send a car for him that afternoon because he intended to visit their house at 5 p.m. Swamy did not tell him the reason for the visit, and Ramanadham did not dare to ask. He was a little overwhelmed, for he knew that he was being given a great honour. Swamy usually only left the ashram either to visit his doctor or to go to Arunachala; he had never before been known to invite himself to a devotee's house.

Ramanadham went home and decorated the house in prepara- for the visit. When Sarada heard the news when she came home for lunch she decided to stay away from school and decorate her room as well.

Swamy eventually arrived at 5.30 and he stayed with the family for three hours. During the course of the evening he related an old fable about an elephant and a crocodile. In the story the elephant was drinking by the side of a river when a crocodile attacked it. After a long fight the crocodile got the better of the elephant and started dragging it towards the water. The elephant was on the point of death when it called out to Vishnu to save its life. Vishnu immediately appeared, released the elephant from the crocodile's grip, and took it to safety. Swamy then added, "Like Vishnu in the story



I rushed here tonight to save the life of Sarada. I have seen in one of her past lives that she made a similar threat and carried it out. I am certain that if I had not come here tonight she would have carried out her threat and killed herself.

"The ashram does not belong to the Old Woman and her son, it belongs to me. If I tell you not to come, you will not be allowed to come. If I say that you may come, you may come whatever the Old Woman may say."

As Swamy was concluding his speech, Ramanadham finally relented and allowed his family to visit the ashram again.

# 12
# BANNED AGAIN

The next day most of Sarada's family came to the ashram. Swamy took advantage of the newly-discovered harmony to resolve a long-standing argument between Sarada and Bala. They had not been talking to each other for three years but Swamy managed to sort out their differences and get them speaking to each other again. Sarada then asked if she, Bala and Ramakrishna could come and eat with Swamy every Sunday. Swamy had no objection, and from then on they always ate their Sunday lunch with him.

Four days later Swamy had another argument with the Old Woman which resulted in him taking the keys of the ashram gate from her. The dispute revolved around a devotee who came and insisted that Swamy had to give her *moksha* (liberation) before she died by placing his hands on her head. Swamy remained silent, but after she had gone he told the Old Woman not to let her in again. This particular devotee was a close friend of the Old Woman and, because of this, she said that she could not refuse to let her in. She gave the gate keys to Swamy and told him that if he wanted to keep her out he would have to do it himself. She added that if this lady was be kept out, then Sarada would also have to be banned. Swamy refused to prevent Sarada from coming to see him and he told the Old Woman that he would open the gate to anyone whom he thought was a good devotee. This made the Old Woman angry, but by this time Swamy had already received the keys; it was too late for her to change her mind. From then on, access to Swamy was a little easier.

In contrast to the previous few days, the next few weeks were relatively quiet and uneventful. Sarada continued to go to school, but during the evenings and at weekends she spent as much time with Swamy as possible. She was unable to visit him in the morning because her personal and household chores left her no free time. Her school did not begin until 9.30, but she used to rise at 5 a.m. in order to have time to do all her household work. When all the work was completed she would have a bath and then do a *puja* to Swamy in her room. She would often be doing the *puja* at the time when



she was due to leave for school, and on several occasions her school-friends arrived at the house while she was doing it to ask if she was ready to go to school with them. Sarada attached great importance to the *puja* and often used to do it naked so that she had a legitimate excuse for remaining undisturbed in her room till it was finished.

About a month later, on the 17th of July, Bala and Sarada were sitting on Swamy's veranda. They were talking about Swamy and they were both in an extremely happy mood. Swamy overheard them talking and he invited them into the house saying that he wanted to share in their happiness. When they had seated themselves in his room he started to tell them a story. Sarada says that he had such a radiant smile on his face that day that the grace which was flowing from him was bringing tears to her eyes. She decided to take advantage of his good mood by asking him if she could construct a house in the ashram so that she could always be near him. Swamy was agreeable to the idea and he told her that she could build the house inside his own compound.

When the Old Woman heard about the plan she had another outburst of anger and told Swamy that it was not proper for him to have a young girl of marriageable age living in his compound. Swamy told her that Sarada was his child and that she should not harbour such evil thoughts about her. The Old Woman was adamant and started to cry. She told Swamy that if he insisted on having a young girl in the ashram she must stay in a house outside the gate. Thinking that Sarada would not mind if he asked her to build her house on the other side of the gate, Swamy finally agreed to the Old Woman's request, and a temporary peace was restored. Bala was in the ashram at the time and he overheard the conversation. When he went home he told Sarada about Swamy's decision not to allow her to build her house inside his compound. Sarada reacted with both anger and tears; she went to school after lunch, but spent the whole afternoon crying in class.

The next day was a Saturday and a festival day, but despite this there was no school holiday and Sarada had to attend school. When she came home at lunchtime she decided that she could not face going back to school that afternoon. When her lunch was finished she told her mother that she was leaving for school, but instead of leaving, she went to the family prayer room with a friend and locked herself in. The room contained several books on Ramana Maharshi and the two girls spent most of the afternoon reading stories about

him. At 3.30 they let themselves out and Sarada told her mother that she had asked her teacher for permission to come home. Bala then appeared and told Sarada that Swamy had asked him to bring her out to the ashram that afternoon. On hearing this, the whole family decided to go and at 5 p.m. they were all assembled outside Swamy's house.

Everyone went into his room except Sarada, who remained outside because she was still angry with Swamy for changing the location of her house. Swamy asked her to come in. She hesitated, but finally she came into the room with tears streaming down her face. Swamy told her that he didn't want to provoke the Old Woman unnecessarily, as living under her shadow was already proving to be difficult. He told Sarada that even though her house would be outside the gate, he would always be with her. Sarada accepted his decision and her anger and tears slowly receded. Her father came to see Swamy later that evening; when Swamy told him about the plan to construct the house, he agreed to the proposal and said that he would pay for all the construction costs.

As Swamy was telling me this story he said that he had deliberately asked Sarada to come and see him that afternoon because he thought that there was a possibility that her angry temperament might cause her to leave him completely. He said that because he had always known that Sarada was capable of realising the Self, he had wanted to do everything in his power to ensure that she remained on the spiritual path.

Sarada was now free to resume her meditation again since she had no more intruding worries to disturb her. Her mind was constantly turned towards Swamy, and everything else, including her schoolwork, was ignored. On the 23rd of July Sarada came to Swamy and told him: "I cannot read my school books any more because I am always thinking of you. The teachers are now getting angry with me. I want to stop going to school." Swamy sympathised with her problem and promised to ask her father if she could leave school. The following day he found an opportunity to speak to Ramanadham and explained the situation to him. Her father had been hoping that Sarada would complete her 10th standard year, but after listening to Swamy's request, he allowed her to leave immediately. Sarada's school career came to an end the same day.

On the last day of July Sarada came for *darshan* and Swamy gave her a lecture on dispassion. He told her that the body was made of



the five elements, and that after death it would be reduced to the same five elements again. He told her not to be attached to the body and that happiness was not to be found in external things. He concluded by saying that happiness was within her as her own Self and that she should not look anywhere else for it. As he was finishing his talk Swamy gave Sarada a big smile. She says that as he looked at her, power flowed from his eyes and caused her whole being to fill with love.

Sarada was intermittently keeping a diary during this period; that evening she wrote down the following comments:

> Bliss is always flowing from Swamy but it depends on the maturity of the disciple how much is received. The more one is free from thoughts, the more one will receive that force. Each devotee will receive grace in proportion to the amount of faith he has. How to get the grace of the Guru? Devotion in past lives is important, and in the present life one must always be engaged in spiritual practices.
>
> God is not a stone statue; he is within every Heart. In the beginning though, his form has to be taken for meditation. It is easy to realise the Self by the grace of the Guru.
>
> He who realises the Self and whose 'I' is dead and who shines as the Self is God. He is the only living Guru. Select only one Guru. The Guru must be peaceful and have control of his senses and his mind. A Guru is essential and he must attract like a magnet. I have been able to select a suitable Guru.

After Swamy had given her the lecture on detachment he asked her again about her decision not to marry. When Sarada confirmed her decision Swamy told her, "Then you can get enlightened". Sarada thought that Swamy would not be continually asking this question unless he doubted her sincerity. In order to finally convince him she told him, "When I look at Swamy it is as if I am looking at God. I am always in bliss in your presence, but when you ask me about marriage I get angry. I shall remain in *brahmacharya* [the state of celibacy] or I shall die. I shall not go back on my word for I don't want that life of a dog."

That night Sarada and Bala slept in the mandir, but at 6 a.m. she was back in the house asking to see Swamy again. (As Sarada was re-

lating this story Swamy interrupted and said, "She always used to ask if she could come and see me for a minute, but she would always stay for at least an hour".) After she had prostrated to Swamy she said, "No matter how many times I look at you it is not enough. I wish to stay with you forever so I can always be looking at you." Swamy made no reply. When she saw him again in the evening she repeated her request: "I wish to stay here permanently. When I am away from your presence I cannot bear the pangs of separation." This time Swamy consoled her by saying, "Wait a few more days and then you can come and stay here". Reassured by this promise, Sarada left the ashram and went home.

The next day Swamy seemed to change his mind about allowing Sarada to stay with him. He told her that he had had another argument with the Old Woman about Sarada's presence in the ashram. He said that the Old Woman had heard a story about a swami who was receiving a lot of bad publicity because he had allowed a woman to come and stay with him. She had said that she didn't want Swamy to end up like this man. Swamy said that he had tried to reassure her by saying that Sarada's mind was pure and that she had no bad intentions, but the Old Woman had refused to listen to him. Swamy said that she had had another outburst of anger and, in order to placate her, he had had to promise her that he would cut down on the number of times that Sarada was allowed to see him. Swamy continued, "Because of this argument you should not come to the ashram daily in future. You may come on Sundays, but for the rest of the week you must stay at home. However, you can stay with me for a few minutes now."

Sarada was shattered by this new turn of events. The day before she had been on the verge of moving in with Swamy, but now she found herself banned from the ashram for six days a week. She burst into tears, but not even tears would make Swamy change his decision. He told Bala to take her to the mandir and play her some devotional songs to try and calm her down.*

When they went to the mandir and tried to play a record the Old Woman and her son appeared and prevented them. They both got angry with Sarada and Bala and asked them to leave the ashram. Instead, Bala went back to Swamy's house and told him that

* There was a record player in the mandir. Each Sunday afternoon, before Swamy gave his public *darshan*, devotional songs would be played there for about an hour.



they were being prevented from using the record player. Swamy decided to come to the mandir to sort out the problem. When he arrived he asked Bala to put on a record, but the Old Woman immediately protested by saying, "If you ask us to do it we will happily do it. We can play the record player whenever you ask, but you have no business with these children." Swamy turned to the Old Woman and told her, "I have no attachment to relatives. Those who have devotion are my relatives. I am the Self in everyone's Heart." He then sat down with Bala and Sarada to ensure that they were not bullied again.

One of the songs on the record that Bala had put on contained the following words: "Are you existing, O God? Are you existing? If so, why are you closing your eyes? I am your devotee but now I am a beggar. I have given my life to you but you have forgotten me." Sarada started to cry again when she heard these words. Swamy, who had also heard the words and recognised their significance, turned to her and gave her a smile. Sarada's tears began to dry up and she too began to smile. For a few moments Sarada thought that Swamy was going to revoke his decision to ban her from the ashram, but when he was sure that she had recovered he went back to his house without saying a word.

Sarada's agonies were beginning all over again. Without access to Swamy her life was meaningless. On the first day of her separation she sat on the roof of her house crying, oblivious of the hot sun that was beating down on her. She refused to eat, and eventually her mother had to feed her with her own hands. As she was feeding her she tried to console her, but nothing she said made any difference. Sarada said that her life would end if she was not able to see Swamy every day; she spent the whole of that evening crying until she finally fell asleep around mindnight.

She was unable to sleep for long. At 2 a.m. she woke up and started to cry again. She spent the rest of the night weeping and praying to Swamy. Over and over again she repeated the same prayer: "Why do you make me like this? I am giving my life to you and I cannot live without looking at you. Please talk with me and give me your gracious smile, for without your smile I cannot live."

The next morning she was visited by one of her schoolfriends. The girl tried to console her and persuade her to come back to school. She told Sarada, "Don't cry continuously like this. You only left school a few days ago. Now you can come back and see your friends

again." School was the last thing that Sarada needed at that point and she told her friend, "My life is quite different from yours. I have completely surrendered my body and mind to Swamy and I cannot follow any other path."

Unable to bear the separation any longer, Sarada sat down and wrote a letter to Swamy asking him to allow her to come and see him again.

> Sri Lakshmana Bhagavan. You are God who gives bliss. I cannot leave you even for a minute. You are my mother, father, Guru, God. Whatever you say I will do. I wish to stay always with you, and I am only happy when I am with you. I have no other direction to go. I cannot forget your name, and I shall always be thinking about your name and form. You are the foundation for me, and my burden is yours forever. If I realise the Self I shall have no business with you. Till then I have to stay with you. You attracted my mind, and now you have stolen it.

At the conclusion of the letter she composed a poem:

> In my difficulties you will hear my words and you will help me. In leaving me you cannot go anywhere for you are the Self. Please don't cast me aside. I am surrendering my life to you. What use is this life without looking at your form?

Bala took the letter to Swamy, but Swamy's only comment was that the poem was very good.

Sarada's exile lasted nearly a week. On the 8th of July, when she was paying her first permitted weekly visit to the ashram, Swamy told her that he had only been testing her devotion again. He said that he had wanted to see what her reaction would be if he appeared to take the Old Woman's side in her long-running dispute with her. Swamy said that she had passed the test well. From then on he always sided with Sarada when she got into fights with the Old Woman.

# 13
# ADOPTION

A few days later Swamy took Sarada out into the main ashram compound and showed her where her new house should be built. As he showed her the site he consoled her by pointing to his own house and saying that she would be able to see him whenever he was in the upstairs section of his house.

Later that day Swamy developed an irritating skin rash. At first he thought that it was only mosquito bites, but after Sarada had gone home the rash became much worse. Late in the evening he sent a message to Sarada's house asking for medical assistance. When Sarada heard that Swamy was ill she was unable to eat her evening meal. She gave her food to the dog and decided that she had to go and see Swamy in his hour of need. It was difficult for her to leave undetected, but when no one was looking, she took a blanket and secretly left the house.

Bala had meanwhile gone to tell their family doctor about Swamy's condition. He had described Swamy's symptoms to him and the doctor had given him a prescription for some medicine. However, because it was late at night, Bala had been unable to find a chemist which sold it. When he informed his father of all this, Ramanadham decided that he would try to persuade the doctor to pay a personal visit to Swamy. Ramanadham and the doctor were old friends and when they met he had no difficulty in persuading him to visit the ashram. As they left the hospital together Ramanadham saw Sarada standing by the side of the road. She had been waiting there for some time in the hope of getting a ride to the ashram on the back of Bala's cycle. Ramanadham did not want her to be out alone in the middle of the night and he ordered her to go home. When Sarada protested he pointed out that it was after 9.30 p.m. and that she could easily see Swamy the following morning. Ramakrishna, one of Sarada's younger brothers, had accompanied his father to the hospital. Ramanadham turned to him and told him to take Sarada home.

Sarada had no intention of giving up so easily. As soon as they were out of their father's sight she persuaded Ramakrishna to go

home by himself. She then started to walk towards the ashram. She had only been walking for a few minutes when Bala passed her on his cycle. He offered her a ride to the ashram and Sarada gratefully accepted. As soon as they arrived there she concealed herself near Swamy's house because her father and the doctor had already arrived.

The doctor examined Swamy, gave him an injection and then returned to Gudur with Ramanadham. A few minutes after their departure Sarada and Bala emerged from their hiding place and went into the house.

Swamy was extremely pleased that Sarada's devotion had made her want to come and see him in the middle of the night. He told her, "It is a long distance and you have come alone. I am in pain but you are the only one who came to see me.* Tomorrow I shall ask your father to give you to me as my adopted daughter." Swamy then asked her to sit with him for a few minutes. While they were sitting in silence the Old Woman, who was also in the room with them, told Swamy to send Sarada away. Swamy ignored her completely and eventually allowed Sarada to stay until well after midnight. Finally, to please the Old Woman, Swamy told her that she should leave. He suggested that she sleep on his veranda, but when the Old Woman objected, she went to the mandir instead.

Ramanadham came to the ashram early the following morning. When Swamy told him that he wanted to adopt Sarada as his daughter he raised no objection. The adoption ceremony, which took place immediately, was brief and informal. Swamy assembled everyone who was in the ashram and then addressed the following question to Sarada: "Are you going to stay with me always, from today onwards?". Sarada replied "Yes". Swamy continued, "From today I am taking you from Ramanadham as my adopted daughter. From today onwards you are my daughter." Then Swamy addressed the Old Woman: "From today onwards Sarada is your granddaughter. Look after her. Give her hot water and attend to her other needs." The Old Woman deliberately looked away from Swamy's face while he was speaking to her and his words had no effect. She made no attempt to supply Sarada with any of her needs, nor did

* Bala was already staying in the ashram. Since there was no accommodation there he slept in the mandir at night.



she lessen her attempts to drive her from the ashram.

Sarada's brother Bala had already been staying in the mandir for about ten days; Sarada now joined him in sleeping there each night. Swamy's decision to adopt her and his invitation to her to stay full-time in the ashram had come unexpectedly, and at first she had none of her belongings with her. On the evening of the 13th of July she went home to collect her possessions and the following morning she finally left her parents' house and came to live at the ashram. There were no washing or toilet facilities for devotees in the ashram at that time, so Bala and Sarada used to go to their parents' house each morning and then return to the ashram about 7 a.m. They spent the hours of 7–9 in the morning and 12–2 in the afternoon with Swamy, and the rest of the day they stayed in the mandir.

On the same day that Swamy adopted Sarada as his daughter (12.7.75), the Old Woman's son found Bala and Sarada asleep on the veranda of Swamy's house. He asked them to leave and told them that in future they should not sleep at all inside Swamy's compound. The Old Woman's son then tried to persuade Swamy to keep them out of his house completely, but Swamy replied, "In the morning from 7–9 and in the afternoon from 12–2 they will stay with me. They came here giving up everything for me. How can I send them away? It is not good to send them away. In the 25 years since I realised the Self no one has come to me like this and surrendered so completely. It is not fair to send them away. All the other devotees only come here to fulfil their desires, but these children have come here to meditate, and they have no problems at home. They will continue to spend their time with me."

The next day was an auspicious one for laying the foundation stone of Sarada's new house. Swamy had already shown Sarada where to build the house; that morning he came and helped to lay the first stone. As the construction began Swamy went back to his house. Sarada watched for a few minutes and then followed him. When she reached the house she stood on his veranda and looked in through one of the windows. Swamy soon noticed her and asked her why she had such a worried expression on her face. Sarada replied, "I want to stay on this veranda always, even though you will not allow me. I don't want this new house. I want to spend my whole time with you."

"It is not possible at the moment," replied Swamy. "There is a

dispute. The Old Woman and her son are thinking badly of you. I have taken you as my daughter, but instead of loving you they are always criticising you."

Swamy wanted her to stay, but for the moment he found it expedient to humour the Old Woman by occasionally giving in to her demands. Swamy was becoming as attached to Sarada as she was to him, but he had to keep up a front of occasional hostility to satisfy the Old Woman. Although Swamy's love for Sarada was not as visible as her love for him, it was nevertheless still there; two examples of it came to light in the last weeks of August. On the 20th of that month Sarada's period started, forcing her to return to Gudur for three days. The following day she received a letter from Swamy, the first she had ever received from him. It was a brief note which said, "Blessings to my daughter Sarada. Your divine love is flowing like oil. I thank you." The second example came ten days later. Swamy was alone in his house when the whole room filled with light. He said that he was aware that if he had surrendered himself to the light he would have given up the body. Such an occurrence would have made no difference to his state, but he was unable to give up his body because his love for Sarada was now tying him to a bodily existence. As he was telling me this he remarked, "What would have happened to Sarada if I had disappeared? So I got up and retained the body."

On the second night of her stay in Gudur Sarada had another dream about Swamy. In the dream Swamy told her, "You are my child. Don't leave the ashram and don't go anywhere. No one is staying in the ashram because no one is able to stay except you. The others cannot stand my tests. After my death you must stay in the ashram. You are the light of the ashram and you must not go anywhere. You have to give light to devotees."

Sarada says that she used to dream about Swamy every night, but she can only remember some of the important dreams where Swamy gave her instructions. In most of her dreams she would be laughing and playing with Swamy, but sometimes he would just sit and give her silent *darshan*. When Swamy gave her instructions in her dreams she would write them down the following morning. There were many dreams of this sort, but unfortunately Sarada can no longer remember what she did with her written accounts of them.

About six weeks after the adoption ceremony a 20-year-old boy from Gudur called Bhaskara came to the ashram. He first turned up



on August the 23rd to help Sarada and Bala clean Swamy's house. After watching him work both Swamy and Sarada were favourably impressed by his humility and devotion. When the cleaning was over Bhaskara told Sarada that he would like to stay in the ashram full-time.

Bhaskara's family were strongly opposed to him even visiting the ashram. They had not been able to dissuade him from coming once, and when he announced that he wanted to live near Swamy his mother came to register her opposition. She told Swamy that her son was not fit for the spiritual life because he was prone to violent attacks of anger during which he would smash and break things in the home. She added that his astrologers had predicted that his devotion would only last for two years. Bhaskara replied that he had only broken things once as a protest because his family would not allow him to come and see Swamy. This remark embarrassed his mother so much that she left almost immediately.

Despite the opposition of his family, the boy returned in September and was given permission to stay. He slept in the mandir with Bala and Sarada and during the day he helped them with their work in the ashram. Bhaskara had no money of his own and his family had refused to give him any while he was at the ashram. On the day that he came to stay he annoyed his family even more by selling one of their tables so that he could have money to buy an offering of fruit for Swamy. When Bala and Sarada realised now precarious his financial position was, they persuaded their parents to supply him with food every day.

Bhaskara soon noticed that Swamy was showering his love and grace on Sarada and he asked her what she was doing to receive such special treatment. Sarada replied, "I am always thinking of Swamy as my Heart. Everywhere I look I see Swamy. He is my loving father and God." Bhaskara was a little taken aback by this and he told Sarada that it was not yet possible for him to feel love and devotion as strongly as she did. Sarada advised him that if he wanted to follow the path that she had followed, then he should start doing *japa* of '*Hare* Lakshmana' and take every opportunity to look into Swamy's face. She told him that if he gave love to Swamy, then Swamy would love him in return.

Bhaskara started doing the *japa* which Sarada prescribed but he came back later that day and said that the *japa* was sending him to sleep all the time. Sarada laughed and said that she couldn't help

him with his problem. She said, "My experience is exactly the opposite. If ever I am feeling sleepy then I only have to think of Swamy and this keeps me awake." Since Sarada was thinking of Swamy virtually all the time it is not surprising that she slept very little during this period. She says that she often only slept 3–4 hours each night, and even during her sleeping periods she was frequently dreaming of Swamy.

On the third day of his stay Bhaskara's mother went to Sarada's house in Gudur. She had come to inform Ramanadham that she was opposed to her son staying in the ashram. While she was there she also told him that his family would not support him until he came home. Ramanadham replied that he was willing to look after Bhaskara himself; he told the woman that he would look after all his material needs so long as he stayed at the ashram. This annoyed Bhaskara's mother so Ramanadham tried to soften the blow by telling her that Swamy was considering Bhaskara for the job of ashram manager. This cheered her up a little since she was not then aware that there was virtually nothing at the ashram that needed managing.

Bhaskara's mother then decided to go to the ashram herself to ascertain what was happening and to renew her attempts to persuade her son to come home. As she was approaching the ashram she was accosted by the Old Woman who warned her not to have anything to do with Ramanadham's family. The Old Woman told her that Ramanadham prepared a special herbal medicine, and that if he gave that medicine to anyone, that person would be compelled to obey him. She told Bhaskara's mother that Ramanadham was already feeding regular doses of the medicine to Swamy, which was why he was supporting Sarada and her family in the frequent arguments that broke out in the ashram. The Old Woman advised her to take her son away immediately. If she delayed any more, said the Old Woman, Ramanadham would make Bhaskara marry Sarada by giving him a dose of the medicine and then compelling him to do it.

Bhaskara's mother was gullible enough to believe the story. She went straight to Swamy, recounted what the Old Woman had said, and told Bhaskara that he should come home immediately, before Ramanadham had a chance to get him under his control. Bhaskara refused to leave and his mother went home alone.

The next day a doctor, accompanied by a friend of Bhaskara's



brother and a workman from Bhaskara's house, came to the ashram at 9 a.m. and asked for *darshan*. Since Swamy was resting at the time they were asked to wait in the mandir. After about half an hour the friend of Bhaskara's brother came into Swamy's garden and asked Bhaskara to come out for a few minutes. Bhaskara, who had been working in the garden with Sarada and Bala, went out to see what he wanted. As soon as he was outside Swamy's gate he was grabbed by his brother's friend and the workman and dragged to the mandir. All the way there he kept calling out "Bala! Sarada! *Hare* Lakshmana!". When Sarada saw what was happening she started to cry and asked Bala to save him, but Bala was unable to prevent the two men from dragging Bhaskara away. When they reached the mandir the doctor gave Bhaskara an injection which made him unconscious. Then Bhaskara's brother, who had been waiting outside the ashram in a car, drove into the ashram, picked up his three accomplices and the unconscious Bhaskara, and drove away again.

Bhaskara was taken to his family's house in town and locked in a room for three days to prevent him from escaping. Initially he refused to eat and kept saying that he wanted to see '*Hare* Lakshmana'. He told his family that unless he saw him he would die. However, after a few days, realising that he was unlikely to overcome the implacable opposition of his family, he resigned himself to his fate and promised not to visit Swamy again. He kept his word and he never returned to the ashram. Sarada was sad to see him go, for in the short time that she had known him she had formed a high opinion of him. She feels that had he been allowed to stay, he would have made a very good devotee.

After the dramatic departure of Bhaskara, Bala and Sarada slept alone in the mandir while they waited for the new house to be completed. The Old Woman tried to prevent the house from being built by refusing to allow the builders permission to take water from the ashram well, but after several arguments with Swamy she finally relented and allowed the construction to continue.

Swamy used to come to the mandir every evening between 6.30 and 7.30 and tell devotional stories to Bala and Sarada. After his departure they would stay there for the rest of the evening. Because the mandir had no front wall they were only partly protected from the monsoon winds and rains. When it rained heavily the wind would blow the rain into the mandir and Bala and Sarada would have to

huddle against the back wall in an attempt to stay warm and dry.

Their father came one evening and saw a cobra on the veranda of the mandir. He had tolerated his children getting wet every night but this was the last straw for him. He went and told Swamy that the mandir was not fit to live in, and he asked him to tell Bala and Sarada to spend their nights in Gudur; he knew that if Swamy ordered them to do it they would go. Swamy had already told Sarada and Bala that if it rained heavily during the night they could come and sleep in his house, but Sarada had pointed out that if she walked from the mandir to his house while it was still raining she would get much wetter than she would if she spent the whole night in the mandir.

The next day Swamy told Sarada that her father wanted her to sleep at home and he asked her if she was willing to go. When Sarada refused to go home, Swamy said that both she and Bala could sleep in his kitchen at night. The Old Woman protested, but Swamy ignored her disapproval and Bala and Sarada moved into the house with him.

Four nights later Sarada had a dream in which a large group of people were trying to abduct her. As they closed in on her she called "Swamy! Swamy!", and as she did so, Swamy says that he was aware of her calling him in the Heart. As Swamy was telling this story he explained that it is possible for one enlightened person to call another simply by being aware of that person in the Heart. Before this dream Swamy said that he had not thought it possible for an unenlightened person to call him in this way; he was enormously impressed with Sarada's feat.

The next morning the Old Woman came to the house and told Swamy that because the rains had stopped Sarada should be sent back to the mandir. Swamy replied that he now knew that Sarada was a very advanced devotee because the previous night she had been able to call him in the Heart. He told the Old Woman, "Because of this I have decided that they can stay here until the house is finished".

The Old Woman started to cry and she pleaded with Swamy to change his mind. When Swamy refused to give in to her demands the Old Woman said that she too would come and live in the house. Swamy told her that she was welcome to come, and Sarada added that she and Bala would look after her. It would seem that it was never really the Old Woman's intention to move in with them; in



the face of this unexpected welcome she withdrew her proposal to move in and carried on living in her own house.

The argument about accommodation was finally resolved in an unexpected way. There was a sudden downturn in Ramanadham's mica business and he discovered that he no longer had any money to spare for Sarada's house. The Old Woman demanded that Bala and Sarada be sent back to the mandir, but Swamy refused. Their temporary stay in his house suddenly became a permanent arrangement. Sarada's house, which had produced so many tears and arguments in the preceding weeks, was not finally completed until 1978. Sarada never moved into it and it is now used to house visiting devotees.

# 14

# ARUNACHALA-SIVA

In November of that year Sarada paid her second visit to Arunachala. On her previous visit the year before, when she had barely begun her spiritual practices, she had prayed to Arunachala to enable her to remain unmarried so that she could devote herself full-time to meditation. Her wish had been granted: her family had accepted her decision not to marry, and she had spent the whole of the previous year meditating on Swamy's form.

Her visit in 1975 coincided with the Deepam festival, the biggest event of the year at Arunachala. Each year, hundreds of thousands of people gather to watch a sacred fire being ceremonially lit on the top of Arunachala. The fire is lit to commemorate a puranic story in which Siva demonstrates that he is greater than Brahma and Vishnu. The story begins with Brahma and Vishnu arguing with each other about which of them is the greater. Siva, seeing them arguing, decided to give them a lesson in humility. He appeared before them in the form of an infinitely long column of light and told them that they could settle their dispute by a competition. He said that if Brahma could find the end of the column of light he could consider himself greater than Vishnu, and vice versa. The two gods took up the challenge. Vishnu took the form of a boar and attempted to find the bottom of the column of light by burrowing into the earth; Brahma took the form of a swan and tried to find the other end. Both gods tried for years to find an end to the column, but neither was successful. Eventually they returned to their starting point and acknowledged their defeat. They then both proceded to worship Siva since he had demonstrated that he was greater than either of them. Siva was pleased with their show of humility and he asked them if they had any wishes that he could grant. Vishnu and Brahma said that the column of light was too dazzling for people to see and they requested Siva to manifest as a mountain instead. Siva willingly granted this request and transformed himself into the mountain of Arunachala.

This myth is one of the central elements of Tamil folklore and culture. It has shaped the beliefs of countless generations of South

Sarada at Arunachala in 1975, the year she had her vision of Siva.

Sarada's vision of Siva, described by Sarada and drawn by Cindy Chambers, one of her devotees.



Indians to such an extent that the myth has merged into reality; many people now believe that the mountain really is a physical manifestation of Siva. This belief should not be lightly dismissed as an ignorant superstition; for over a thousand years saints and sages have experienced the spiritual power of Arunachala and have written poems in praise of its greatness. In recent times both Ramana Maharshi and Lakshmana Swamy have identified Siva with the Self, and they have both stated that Arunachala is Siva in the form of a mountain.

Swamy, Sarada and twenty other devotees arrived at Arunachala on the 12th of November, five days before the end of the ten-day Deepam festival. On one of the days preceding the evening when the fire was lit, Sarada walked the eight-mile *pradakshina* route around the mountain. As she did so, she prayed to Arunachaleswara (Siva) that she might have a vision of his form.

On the evening of the 17th, Swamy and his devotees assembled on the lower slopes of Arunachala in a place where they could have a good view of the fire being lit on the top of the mountain. The devotees were all singing *Aksharamanamalai*, one of Ramana Maharshi's hymns in praise of Arunachala. As they were all singing, Swamy was beating the rhythm with his hand. Swamy says that as the *bhajan* was being sung, Sarada looked at him and he could see that she was overflowing with love for him. Sarada then closed her eyes and the holy fire was lit on top of the mountain.

At the moment when the fire was lit Sarada felt that both Swamy and the fire were inside her, and not on the mountain. Then, with her eyes still closed she had an inner vision in which Swamy appeared on top of the mountain. After a few seconds the vision of Swamy's form changed into the form of Siva, but it still remained on the top of the mountain. She opened her eyes, but it made no difference; Siva's form was still hovering over Arunachala. The form she was seeing sometimes looked like Swamy and sometimes it changed into Siva. When it manifested as Siva he was light blue in colour, he had a snake coiled around his neck, *vibhuti* on his forehead, and a long string of rudraksha beads around his neck. When Siva first appeared Sarada only saw his top half with the Deepam fire burning in his heart, but as the vision developed, Siva manifested in his full form and started to dance blissfully on top of the mountain.

Siva then addressed Sarada and said, "I am Swamy. We are one

and not different." He then invited Sarada to come and join him, but Sarada refused, saying, "I cannot leave Swamy. I don't want to come." The vision then changed its form and Sarada saw a cave bathed in a dim blue light near the top of Arunachala. When she first looked at it she saw a single throne outside it which was occupied by Siva. After a few seconds she noticed that there was a smaller empty throne next to him. Siva sat on the larger of the two thrones, but the smaller one remained vacant. Sarada asked him, "Where is Mother [Parvati, the consort of Siva]?" and Siva replied, "There is no Mother, you come and sit here". Sarada refused to go and started to cry. As she was crying she repeatedly banged her head on a stone. Whenever she looked at the mountain she saw Siva dancing in bliss. Because she didn't want to accept Siva's invitation, and because she wanted to stay with Swamy, she looked away from the mountain and kept her eyes firmly closed. Swamy and the other devotees helped her back to her room, but even there she saw the same vision of Siva dancing. She started to bang her head on the wall in an attempt to make the vision go away; eventually she succeeded.

When she returned to Gudur the same vision appeared from time to time, but gradually the intervals between its appearance became longer and longer; after six months it finally disappeared. When Sarada had finished telling me this story I asked Swamy what would have happened if she had accepted Siva's invitation. Swamy replied:

> If Sarada had surrendered to Siva and accepted his invitation she would have given up the body then and there. She would have been absorbed in Arunachala. She would not have realised the Self, she would merely have become a great *devata* [goddess] inhabiting the mountain. For Self-realisation she would have had to take birth again. Instead, her devotion to me kept her in the body. Now that she has realised the Self she can help other devotees. How could she have done this without realisation and without a body?

Out of curiousity I then asked Swamy if he had ever seen Arunachaleswara, either on this or on any other occasion. He replied:

> Only once, but it was not a full vision like Sarada had. Once



> I was lying in my room at Sri Ramanasramam with severe stomach pains, wondering if I would be fit enough to give *darshan* that day. The door of my room was locked on the inside, but suddenly Arunachaleswara appeared before me in the form of a *siddha purusha* [perfected being] in a *kaupina*. He embraced me and the pain immediately stopped. Then he disappeared. Soon after that I got up and gave *darshan*.

# 15

# FIGHTS, TESTS, TEARS AND MEDITATION

Most of the events which have been related so far were recorded by Sarada in her diary, which is why it has been possible to describe the events of this year in such detail. The diary ended in August 1975, and neither Swamy nor Sarada seem to be able to recollect many of the events which happened between November 1975 and May 1978. However, both of them are agreed that it was a bleak period for Sarada. They were years of continuous fights with the Old Woman, and while Sarada cannot remember any of the details, she recalls that she spent a portion of every day crying. Mostly her tears were a result of her fights with the Old Woman, but at times they were also caused by Swamy's tests. She says that she became such an expert at crying during this period that she can now realistically cry whenever she feels like it.

The daily fights with the Old Woman affected her meditation; she often found it impossible to concentrate on Swamy's form because some fight or argument would still be fresh in her mind. During one period, her problems with the Old Woman became so acute that on one occasion she seriously considered committing suicide. She was sitting on the edge of Swamy's well, thinking that she would jump in and end her life, when Swamy noticed her, divined her intentions, and summoned her into his house. She meekly obeyed and abandoned her plans. On another occasion she thought that she could escape from the Old Woman's malice by going to live at Arunachala, but the plan never materialised.

In order to escape from the Old Woman's anger, Sarada tried to meditate near the top of a tree in Swamy's garden. Her own version of this story makes it clear that this episode in her life was not a great success.

> At one time when I was doing my *sadhana* here I used to sit near the top of the tamarind tree in Swamy's garden and meditate on a photo of him. It was very peaceful up there. Swamy's mother couldn't disturb me, and for a long time



> I enjoyed very peaceful and blissful states of meditation. Other devotees started to compliment me on how well I was meditating, and my ego started to rise. Swamy watched all this for a few days, and then at the next public *darshan* he gave a long talk on how some people sit in strange *asanas* [positions] to meditate, and how such people get proud of their peaceful and blissful states and think that they are well on the way to Self-realisation. I realised that he was referring to me, although he never mentioned my name. After that I never went up the tree again and I started meditating in the garden again.
>
> This is typical of the way Swamy gives out advice. He very rarely criticises anyone directly. If he ever wants to give advice he makes impersonal comments, and the person concerned has to realise that the advice is meant for him.

Swamy added to her burden by subjecting her to frequent tests. On one occasion he set her to work as a coolie in the ashram grounds, making her carry sand continually from the cow-shed to his house, a distance of about 150 yards. When other devotees saw her they laughed and ridiculed her, saying that Swamy was taking advantage of her devotion to get himself a free worker for the ashram. Sarada was unperturbed by these comments. Several years later she told me, "I carried sand because I loved Swamy and because he had ordered me to do it. I cannot swim, but if he had ordered me to jump in the well I would have happily jumped in the well."

In 1977 Swamy asked Sarada to give him her gold earrings which were worth about Rs 500. She immediately handed them over. Swamy did not give them back for several hours, and during that period Sarada really believed that she had lost the earrings for good. She says that, rather than being unhappy at their loss, she was elated because she had finally managed to give something to Swamy. She says that she often asked him if she could give him anything, but his usual reply was, "I don't want your presents, I want your mind".

On another occasion Swamy completely ignored her for weeks, partly to test her love and equanimity, and partly to reduce her pride. Sarada recalls:

> For weeks together he would not look at me even once. Inside I felt both confusion and pride. I felt that I was his best

devotee, and I thought that he at least ought to look at me occasionally. Being ignored was good for my pride. I used to cry when I was ignored, but it didn't make any difference; he still wouldn't look at me. I understood the lesson and felt that even if he was not looking at me physically, he was with me internally, always looking at me inside. I felt happy and relieved when I realised this. I felt that he could look at other devotees all the time because it didn't matter whether or not he was physically looking at me. As a substitute for the physical *darshan* I mentally imagined him looking at me and that was enough for me. Eventually Swamy started looking at me again, but by then I had learned a good lesson.

Sarada says that she was subjected to many similar tests during these years, but she can no longer remember any of the details.

One of her worst experiences during this period occurred at the end of 1977 when she survived an attempt on her life. A mentally disturbed woman had been coming to see Swamy for some time. On Sundays, during the public *darshans*, she would sit in the mandir and repeatedly ask the same question: "Swamy, you have stolen my *Omkar* [the sound of *Om*]. Please give it back to me." Swamy never made any reply. Sometimes the woman would also come during the week, stand outside Swamy's gate, and repeat the same question. Both Sarada and Bala told her to go away but she never paid any attention to them. On one of these week-day visits she made a hole in Swamy's fence, broke into his garden and started dancing on his veranda. When she had finished her performance Bala took her to the mandir and arranged for her relatives to come and collect her. A few days later she broke in again while Swamy and Sarada were standing on the veranda of the house. The woman tried to grab Swamy, but Sarada prevented her from reaching him by throwing her body between them. Swamy quickly went back into his house because he thought that the woman would calm down once she realised that she could not reach him. Instead, the woman grabbed hold of Sarada's hair and tried to kill her by banging her head against a wall. When Swamy saw that the woman was attacking Sarada he immediately came out of his house. He managed to loosen the woman's grip by hitting her with a rope, and this enabled Sarada to escape relatively unscathed. The woman had managed to bang Sarada's head against the wall three times before Swamy



rescued her, but fortunately she did not suffer any serious injuries. During the course of the fight there was a brief scuffle during which the woman managed to scratch both Swamy and Sarada so badly that blood flowed from their wounds. The woman was eventually evicted from the ashram and she never returned.

Sarada continued to have frequent dreams of Swamy, but the only one that she can remember in any detail occurred in May 1976. In the dream Swamy appeared in the mandir in the form of a magician. It was a particularly ferocious form and when Sarada saw him she was filled with fear. Some devotees were singing *bhajans* in the mandir but Swamy asked them all to run away. Everyone ran except Sarada, who walked away from him very slowly and fearfully. Swamy followed Sarada, telling her to go as fast as she could. All the devotees ran until they reached a mountain. Without even pausing, they all started to climb towards the peak. They all took different paths but none of them knew the right way to go. Sarada says that the devotees had hardly started to climb when they all seemed to collapse and die. Sarada looked around her and, seeing the correct path to the top, she climbed it slowly, passing dead bodies on either side. As she reached the peak she noticed that Swamy was still behind her. He asked her how many devotees had managed to reach the peak and Sarada replied that she was the only one. Swamy looked around him, saw that what she had said was true, and said, "You alone have been able to come to the peak of the mountain. It is the path of *jnana*, and you alone have been able to stand on the top. You are the light of the ashram." After saying this, Swamy escorted her back to the ashram, leaving the bodies of the other devotees behind.

Sarada's spiritual progress regained its momentum after she paid another visit to Arunachala in the first week of May 1978. Her two previous visits had been milestones in her spiritual career; this third visit provided the impetus which put her on to the final road to realisation.

On the third day of her visit she did *pradakshina* of the mountain in the company of several of Swamy's devotees. On her two previous visits, Arunachala had answered her prayers for a life of meditation and for a vision of Siva. On this third visit her only desire was that Arunachala free her from thoughts. She went around the hill thinking alternatively of Swamy and Arunachala and praying to Arunachala that her desire might be fulfilled.

Several hours later Swamy and his devotees assembled on the lower slopes of Arunachala. Swamy told the devotees that their minds must be like that of a five-year-old child. Swamy looked at Sarada as he was saying this, for he already knew that her mind was in such a state. As Swamy looked at her and smiled, Sarada completely lost both thoughts and body consciousness. Unable to make any response she smiled vacantly back at Swamy. As the sun began to set and the devotees started to return to their rooms, Sarada went straight to the meditation hall in Sri Ramanasramam and sat there for an hour and a half, absorbed in a thought-free state.

Swamy gave *darshan* at 9 a.m. the next day. When Sarada entered his room it was already nearly full. She had to sit a long way from Swamy, but when he saw her come in he immediately looked at her and smiled. He could see that she was overflowing with love for him. As soon as he looked at her she entered the same thought-free state again. From 9 a.m. to 10 a.m. Sarada sat in his presence absorbed in a peaceful thought-free state; from that day on, whenever she looked at Swamy during *darshan* she entered the same state.

The peaceful states she was experiencing at Arunachala contrasted sharply with the problems she had been encountering in Gudur. Two days before she was due to leave, she went to the mountain, picked up a stone and prayed to Arunachala: "I am only staying here for two more days. On the day after tomorrow I have to leave. I cannot stay here with you as I must go back with Swamy. You are my father but Swamy is my son. If Swamy stays I shall be happy, but as he is going back to the ashram I must go with him."

Sarada returned to Gudur in a much better frame of mind than when she left. She carried on with her meditation and soon discovered that she could enter a thought-free state whenever she sat with Swamy. For three years she had been thinking continuously of him, but now all thoughts, including thoughts of Swamy, were stopping.

Up till this time Sarada had been spending all her time concentrating on Swamy's name and form. Initially she had been doing *japa* of his name (*Hare* Lakshmana) but later on she concentrated exclusively on his form. She followed these practices so intensively that at times she kept Swamy awake at night with the strength of her devotion. He could feel her love flowing into him, and if she was meditating at night, the flow sometimes prevented him from getting any sleep. He once asked her to stop thinking of him during the night so that he could get enough sleep, but Sarada was unable to stop her devotional flow. If she had no fights or quarrels to distract her she would often do *japa*, or meditate on Swamy's form, for up to 20 hours a day, and in the remaining four hours she would often be dreaming about him. Her experiences with *nama-japa* and the way she successfully managed to control her mind are graphically described in the following passage:



> When I first came here I used to do *japa* of Swamy's name. One day I managed to do it continuously all day. The following day I found that I didn't have to make any effort at all; the name kept repeating itself inside me whatever I was doing. However, this effect only lasted for a day. The following day Swamy's name only appeared when I made a conscious effort to remember it. I decided that if I did *japa* every day for three months, without doing anything else, or thinking of anything else, then that would be enough to keep Swamy's name always with me.
>
> I tried, but I just couldn't do it. Thoughts would come up, I would get carried away by them, and Swamy would be forgotten. After many failures I got so disappointed and disillusioned that I completely stopped doing *sadhana* for a while. I stopped trying to remember his name and I stopped doing *puja* to him. This stoppage didn't last very long. I soon felt so guilty about not doing anything that I deliberately burned my wrist to punish the hand for not doing the *puja*.
>
> After I had been here for a while I fell completely in love with Swamy, and being aware of him for most of the time became easier and easier. My whole body was filled with love, and the love eventually became so strong that it drowned out any negative emotions which arose. If I began to be angry I would just move my attention back to the love inside me and the anger would wither and die. When I first came here I used to get jealous of any other devotees who seemed to be getting a lot of Swamy's attention, but when I got the 'love-body', that is, when my whole body felt as if it consisted of love for Swamy, I would expand the love to include all Swamy's devotees. Instead of feeling resentment that I was being ignored, I would feel happy for the other devotees because they too were experiencing some of the grace of Swamy.

Thoughts would still rise up and I would often get enmeshed in *maya*. I used to try and fight the thoughts but I didn't have much success. Then one day Swamy gave a talk in which he said that since all thoughts rise from Siva in the Heart, all thoughts are his and not yours. He went on to explain that if you can be aware that the thoughts do not belong to you, then the flow of thoughts will cease to disturb you, and eventually it will vanish completely. I decided that this was a new and better way to tackle unwanted thoughts. From that time on, whenever I became aware that my attention had wandered, I would mentally do a *pranam* [prostration] to Siva and offer him back his thoughts. It really worked. After some time I reached a state in which I realised that the thoughts were not mine at all, and after that they didn't trouble me any more.

During this time I was still consciously striving for Self-realisation, because that was what Swamy said I ought to be doing. However, I was very naive and I had no idea about the Self or how it could be attained. I knew that Ramana Maharshi had realised the Self when he was 17; when I passed that age and I was still unenlightened I felt very disappointed. Then I remembered that Swamy had realised the Self when he was 23, and that made me think that I still had a few more years before it was too late.

*Question*: Did Swamy ever tell you how long he thought it would take you to realise the Self?

*Saradamma*: He never said 'five years' or 'ten years' or anything like that, but once or twice he did tell me that this would be my last life. Once, after he had adopted me as his daughter, I asked why he couldn't give me this Self-realisation that he was always talking about. I said that since I was his daughter he ought to give it to me as a fatherly present. Swamy just looked at me with a very stern expression on his face and said that he had no father, no mother and no children because he was the Self, and the Self had no relationship with anyone. He said that the Self could neither be given nor taken, but it would reveal itself when the mind became sufficiently clean and pure. I thought that he was angry with me for asking, so I never brought up the subject again. Soon after that he gave another talk in which he said that the Self was neither happy nor unhappy. This was during my 'love-body' period, before the thoughts of Swamy finally stopped. At that time I would often spend hours being in a blissful state, just from thinking about and loving Swamy, and I didn't want to end up in a state where I couldn't be happy anymore. Swamy sometimes said that there was no mind and no thoughts after Self-realisation. I loved Swamy so much that I didn't want to enter a state in which I couldn't think of him anymore. It was then that I decided that I didn't want Self-realisation and that I would be quite happy if I could stay in a state of permanent blissful devotion.



As an aid to concentration on Swamy's form she often made up imaginary scenes involving herself and Swamy; she would repeat them in her mind again and again. She told me about one such story while we were sitting outside the new hall at Sri Ramanasramam, the same building in which Swamy had realised the Self in 1949.

Before Self-realisation I used to meditate on Swamy's name and form. I didn't know how to meditate properly so I often just used to dream up stories about Swamy. I re-enacted the stories in my head many times. In one story I imagined that Swamy was sitting in front of Ramana Maharshi in this hall, but I would imagine that Swamy was a little boy, not the young man he really was when he came to see Bhagavan. I would walk into the hall and the two of them would be alone together, Bhagavan on his couch, and Swamy on the floor. I would go in and sit down, put Swamy on my knee, and introduce him to Bhagavan as my son. We would talk for a while and then I would realise that Bhagavan had died before I was born and that such a scenario was impossible. Then I would go to the *samadhi* hall [where Sri Ramana was buried], lift up the rock over Bhagavan's body and find him sitting there, looking like the picture taken after his death which is hanging in the dining room here. Next Bhagavan would come alive in a strong healthy young body and I would play with both him and Swamy as if they were both my sons. Sometimes in this story I would get inside the picture which is over the front of the *samadhi*, sit on Bhagavan's knee and play with him. I used to imagine that the *samadhi* hall was full of people, all wondering how I had managed to get inside the picture.

After that we would sometimes go onto the hill and I would

sit Swamy on one knee and Bhagavan on the other. Sometimes Siva would come and visit us and we would all talk and play together.

Suddenly I would open my eyes and realise that I was supposed to be meditating. Swamy was always telling me to meditate properly, and he would often get angry with me because I wouldn't follow his advice. But I didn't know how to meditate properly. I was only interested in loving Swamy, and making up all these stories was one of the ways that I could pour out my love to him. I wasn't interested in meditation or Self-realisation; I just wanted to love Swamy and be his devotee for the rest of my life. I had mentally put off Self-realisation until some future life because I didn't want to give up thinking of Swamy. It was a complete surprise when I suddenly realised the Self.

In most of these imaginary scenes Sarada would play the role of Swamy's mother. She entered into this role so often and so completely that she finally came to believe that Swamy really was her son:

> When I was meditating here I used to imagine that Swamy was my son. I would sit him on my knee, dress him, wash him, feed him and cuddle him. I entered into this role so completely that I really believed that this imaginary Swamy was my baby son. This is called *bhava samadhi* and I found it to be a very good way to keep my attention on Swamy. I became so immersed in this role that when Swamy once told me to stay away from the ashram because of the problems with his mother, I cried, not because I was being asked to leave the ashram, but because I thought that someone was trying to take my baby son away from me.

During her *sadhana* Sarada sometimes visualised Swamy's form in the Heart-centre. When she did this she would enter a blissful state and have uncontrollable fits of laughter. Early in 1978 her father noticed that she was continually laughing. When he asked her why, she replied that she was in such a blissful state that she had to laugh all the time. When her father asked her how one could attain such a state she replied:



"First one must have a pure mind and then one must imagine Swamy's face in the Heart-centre on the right side of the chest. If one's concentration is good, then Swamy's face will start smiling in this centre and the bliss and the laughter will result."

Ramanadham later asked Swamy about this state and he was told that by performing such a practice one could transcend the first four sheaths (*kosas*) and stay in the fifth sheath, the sheath of bliss (*anandamayakosa*). According to *Vedanta* philosophy there are five sheaths, or *kosas*, and three bodies through which the individual self functions. The first sheath is the physical body. The next three sheaths (the *prana*, the mind and the intellect) together constitute the second body, which is called the subtle or dream body. The third body, called the causal body, consists only of the *anandamayakosa*, which is the sheath of bliss. When Swamy said that this practice could enable one to transcend the first four sheaths he was indicating that it could take one to a state where the 'I'-thought could experience the bliss of the Self, uncontaminated by any attachment to, or awareness of, the body and the mind. Swamy cautioned Ramanadham that the blissful state attained by this practice was not the true bliss of the Self, because there was still an 'I'-thought which was experiencing it; he said that the real bliss of the Self would only be revealed when the 'I'-thought completely disappeared.

Two days after Sarada returned from her 1978 trip to Arunachala she had a dream in which she saw Dakshinamurti seated in *padmasana* under a banyan tree. Dakshinamurti is a manifestation of Siva who teaches through silence. He is popularly held to be the spiritual ancestor of all other Gurus and he is always depicted as a young boy sitting under a banyan tree. He is supposed to radiate his silent grace on all who approach him and his image is to be found on the south-facing walls of all South Indian Saiva temples.

In the dream a cool breeze was blowing. When Sarada noticed Dakshinamurti sitting under his tree she felt an urge to approach him. The moon was shining, and as she came near the seated figure she saw that it was Swamy who was sitting there, and not Dakshinamurti. There was a light like the moon shining behind his face and she says that his face was beautiful and God-like. As she looked at him power flowed from his eyes and she entered a peaceful blissful state. She was entranced by the image but when she closed her eyes everything disappeared and she could see nothing but a brilliant

light everywhere she looked. The dream ended, but when she awoke the next morning she was in the same thought-free state that she had previously experienced only in Swamy's presence.

The months of 1978 passed uneventfully and Sarada continued to alternate between periods when the thought of Swamy was dominating her mind and periods when there were no thoughts at all. Throughout the previous three years Swamy had tried to get her to practice self-enquiry, but Sarada's way was surrender, and her only wish was to be constantly thinking of Swamy. Since she often used to meditate by visualising Swamy's face in the Heart-centre, I once asked Swamy if he had prescribed this practice for her. He smiled a little ruefully and said,

> In later years I only ever asked her to do self-enquiry, but she never followed my instructions. In the beginning I told her to do *japa* of my name and to concentrate on my form, but when I tried to get her to change to self-enquiry she refused. Her path was devotion and surrender; she wanted to cling to my name and form forever. She surrendered to me body and mind, and in the end that alone was enough because she realised the Self. Who can say now who was right and who was wrong?

Sarada says that she sometimes pretended to meditate according to Swamy's instructions to stop him getting angry with her, but her attempts never fooled him. She had no interest in self-enquiry because she had no interest in the Self; she didn't want Self-realisation, she only wanted Swamy. Sarada's meditation was not designed to achieve a particular end; holding on to Swamy's form was an end in itself.

In the early days of her meditation Swamy had once told her that it was necessary to meditate if one wanted to be reborn as a human being in one's next life. Sarada had initially feared that if she did not meditate she might be reborn as an animal; this had made her intensify her efforts. In the later years this fear completely disappeared and her love for Swamy was neither motivated by a desire for the Self nor by a fear of rebirth.

# 16
# SELF-REALISATION

At the beginning of October 1978 Sarada's sister, who lived in Bangalore, became ill and Sarada was asked to go and look after her for a few days. She left on the 18th, planning to spend only a few days there, but her sister's condition did not improve and she was unable to return to Swamy until December. Despite the distance between them, her contact with Swamy was still strong. At the end of November she dreamt of Swamy, and even though she opened her eyes and woke up, his image was still there. At the time that Sarada was waking from her dream, Swamy was asleep in his room in the ashram. He says that he 'saw' Sarada in her room at that moment, even though physically he was more than 300 kms. away. This was not the first time that an image of Swamy had materialised before Sarada. In 1975 she had been asleep in Swamy's house, dreaming that she was having his *darshan*. When she woke up the image of Swamy was still there. It stood up, walked through a closed door, and went into the room where Swamy was sleeping. A similar thing happened a year later: Sarada woke up and saw Swamy sitting on a sofa. This time the image got up, went to his bed and lay down. On both occasions Swamy was fast asleep when the image of him appeared. As Sarada was telling me this Swamy remarked, "The Self may take any form. Sarada was thinking and dreaming of me so it took that particular form."

It was during her stay in Bangalore that Sarada first started to go into *kevala nirvikalpa samadhi*. She says that at first she had no idea what these states were; the first few times that it happened she thought that she was only falling into a very pleasant sleep. In between these states her mind, which had been quiet and relatively thought-free for several months, suddenly started getting some very strange desires. During all her years with Swamy she had only ever had one or two cheap outfits to wear, and she had never paid much attention to her personal appearance. Now, in Bangalore, she suddenly started to look at her sister's expensive clothes with a strong desire to be dressed in a similar way. At one point her mind even developed a strong craving for *siddhis*. Sarada watched these desires with great

interest, but she never made any attempt to fulfil them. She says that for the last few months of that year she was in a completely detached state. This enabled her to witness all her thoughts, desires and emotions dispassionately, without ever becoming involved in them.

In the last few weeks that she was in Bangalore she spent nearly all her time either in a thought-free state, or in a state of *samadhi*. She stopped meditating on Swamy, stopped performing *puja* to his picture, and spent many hours of each day lying on her bed. Her sister thought that she was just being lazy; on one occasion she told Sarada, "You live in an ashram, and you are supposed to be a devotee, but you don't meditate any more and you have stopped doing *puja*. What kind of devotee are you? You just lie on your bed all day and do nothing." When the remark was made, Sarada was so deeply immersed in one of her thought-free states that she was incapable of either explaining what was happening to her, or of giving any kind of answer at all.

When Deepam day arrived that year (12.12.78) Sarada roused herself from her thought-free state and celebrated the festival by drawing a picture of Arunachala; she put Swamy's picture and a symbolic light on top of it. As she concentrated on Swamy and Arunachala she entered a thought-free state again; her mind subsided into the Heart and she had a temporary experience of the Self.

The following day she decided that she could not stay in Bangalore any longer and she told her sister that she had to see Swamy urgently. She says that during all the time that she was in Bangalore the world had appeared to her as if it was a dream. With a desire to see Swamy uppermost in her mind she decided that the dream had to end. However, her sister had not fully recovered from her illness and this prevented her from leaving for another three days; she was not able to leave for Gudur until the evening of the 16th.

She returned to Gudur by bus and spent most of the journey in a state of *samadhi*, or near *samadhi*. This was rather inconvenient because she had to change buses in Tirupati. She was conscious enough to get off the bus there with her bag, but then she relapsed into a thought-free state again. A friendly fellow-traveller found her some time later, standing by the side of the road, staring vacantly into space. When he discovered that Sarada was heading for Gudur he put her on the correct bus. Sarada stayed conscious long enough



to pay her fare and then relapsed into a full *samadhi* state for the remainder of the three-hour trip.

She was met by her family in Gudur and escorted to their house. They tried to entertain her by telling her all the latest news and gossip, but she was unable to keep her attention on what they were saying, and she was unable to make any kind of reply herself. Eventually her family just assumed that she was very tired and let her go to bed.

The next morning, at 10 a.m., she went to the ashram, sat down in front of Swamy and tried to tell him about the thought-free states that she had been experiencing. She was still deeply immersed in such a state and she found it hard to speak. Swamy tried to engage her attention by telling her about a few of the events that had been going on in the ashram in her absence, but Sarada couldn't concentrate on anything he said. When she told Swamy that she wasn't capable of paying attention he stopped trying to engage her in conversation. He had been watching her intently ever since she arrived and he could see that the Self was trying to pull the 'I'-thought towards it. A few minutes later a party of visitors came to look at the ashram. Swamy went into his house because he didn't want to see them, but Sarada remained sitting on his veranda. She remained there for the next two hours, immersed in a state of *kevala nirvikalpa samadhi*. Sometimes her eyes were half open, but she wasn't aware of seeing anything because her mind had completely subsided into the Heart. When she kept her eyes open for any length of time the 'I'-thought would rise from the Heart to the brain, but Sarada soon discovered that she could easily make it subside again by closing her eyes.

At about midday Bala brought Swamy and Sarada some food. Swamy called Sarada into the house because he thought that she should have something to eat, but Sarada found that she was incapable of moving by herself. Eventually, Bala and Swamy had to help her into the house. Sarada found it very difficult to eat; the first time she tried she only managed to lift her hand half-way to her mouth. After a few false starts, and with Swamy's help, she finally managed to swallow a little food and drink a little water. She spent the rest of the day, and all of the following night, in *samadhi*. During the course of the day Swamy helped her to walk up and down his veranda a few times, but for the rest of the time he allowed her to remain undisturbed.

The next morning she came out of *samadhi* with a strong awareness that her 'I'-thought was still existing. She remembered the peace of the previous day and night when she had been in *samadhi*, with the 'I'-thought temporarily gone, and she decided to see if she could enter the same state again. She closed her eyes and within a few minutes her 'I'-thought subsided into the Heart and she went back into *samadhi* again. The 'I'-thought emerged from the Heart several times during the day, but each time it subsided Sarada was convinced that she had realised the Self. She was still able to talk and Swamy, thinking that her realisation was near, placed a small tape-recorder near her to record her words. Sarada spoke in short, quiet sentences, with frequent pauses as she was overwhelmed by the bliss of the Self.

> I have no body. I have no 'I'. I am not the body. How I am talking I do not know. Some power is talking through me.

Swamy asked her if she was looking and she replied:

> Even though I am looking, I am not looking. Where is the 'I' to look. When the mind enters the Heart there is no 'I' to tell that there is no 'I'. My 'I' is dead.

Swamy then asked her how she was feeling.

> My whole body is filled with peace and bliss. I cannot describe it. Everything is filled with peace. The Self is pulling me towards it and I am not able to open my eyes. The whole body is weak.

Swamy remarked, "It is like an elephant entering a weak hut. The hut cannot stand the strain. Is it beyond time and death?"

> It is beyond time and death as there is no mind. As the 'I' is dead I don't wish to eat anymore. I am not able to eat. However tasty the food I cannot eat. I have no desire to eat. Everything is filled with peace and bliss. I am content with my realisation. I have recognised my own Self, so I am content.

Swamy then told her that her 'I' was not yet dead and that she had not yet reached the final state. Sarada replied:

> As the 'I' is dead there is no you.



"Have you no mother or father?" asked Swamy.

> No father, no mother, no world. Everything is peace and bliss. Why do I have to eat when there is no 'I'? The body is inert, it cannot eat. A corpse will not eat. It is like that because the 'I' is dead. As I cannot eat I cannot talk. Who is talking I do not know.

"Then who is talking?" asked Swamy. Sarada remained silent and so Swamy answered his own question. "The Self is talking." Sarada continued:

> Even though I am seeing, I am not seeing. Even though I am talking I am not talking. Whatever I do I am not doing it because the 'I' is dead. I have no body. All the nerves are filled with peace and bliss. All is *Brahman*. All is bliss. In the veins instead of blood, love and bliss are flowing. A great power has entered into me.

Three months before Swamy had told Sarada, "Even though I sleep I am not sleeping". Sarada remembered this, repeated Swamy's words and said that she was finally able to understand what he had meant. Sarada continued to talk:

> I have no thought of doing anything. I have no fear of death. Before, I feared death, but not anymore. I don't care about death. I have nothing more to do. I shall give up the body.

Swamy asked her to stay but Sarada answered:

> What is death to die now? The body is inert, how can it die? My 'I' is dead, what is there left to die? Why then fear death?

Swamy then reminded her that her 'I' was not dead and that she was not yet in the final *sahaja* state. Swamy then stopped the tape we were listening to and talked a little about the state that Sarada was experiencing when she spoke these words.

"Anyone whose mind completely subsides into the Heart for a short time can talk like an enlightened person. Their experience of the Self is the same as that of a realised person. However, their 'I'-thought is not dead and it is likely to re-emerge at any time. Such an experience is not the final state because it is not permanent." He then played the final portion of Sarada's comments on her experience.

> I am everywhere. I am not the body. I have no body so I have no fear. I am immobile. Whatever I may do I am immobile. I am shining as the Self. Everything is a great void [*maha-sunya*]. How can I describe the Self in words? It is neither light nor dark. No one can describe what it is. In the past, present and future no one can describe what it is. It is difficult to describe. Self is Self, that is all.

Throughout that day Sarada's mind kept sinking into the Self, but on each occasion it came out again. At 4 p.m. the 'I'-thought went from the Heart to the brain and started to bang against the inside of her skull. Sarada said later that it was like an axe trying to split her head open from the inside. Since she was not able to bear the pain she came forward, took Swamy's hand and placed it on her head. The 'I'-thought went back to the Heart, but again it was only a temporary subsidence. Three minutes later it rose again and once again started to bang against the inside of her skull. Sarada came forward, placed her head on Swamy's feet and a few seconds later the 'I'-thought returned to its source and died forever.

With her 'I'-thought permanently gone Sarada had realised the Self. Swamy says that in the final few minutes her 'I'-thought was trying to escape and take birth again, and that had he not been present, the 'I'-thought would have killed her and escaped.

In the first few minutes after realisation Swamy thought that Sarada was going to give up her body. Her arms and legs went stiff and cold and her blood circulation stopped. Swamy shook her to try and revive her, but she was unable to open her eyes. It occurred to Swamy that if she did give up the body, not only would her family be very angry with him, but he might even be arrested for murder. Eventually he took her to her parents' house in Gudur, but it took five days before Sarada was able to sustain consciousness of her body for any length of time. Throughout this period she was continually saying that she wanted to give up the body, and Swamy had to use all his powers of persuasion to keep her alive.

Swamy gave her the new name of Mathru Sri Sarada; Mathru means mother and Sri is an honorific prefix. He was most anxious that she stay in the body because he felt that she could offer invaluable help to devotees who were seeking the Self. However, he had great difficulty in keeping her alive; Sarada continued to show no interest in retaining her body and for the next twelve months Swamy

Mathru Sri Sarada, two months after she realised the Self.

Swamy smiling; one of Sarada's favourite pictures.



was engaged in a daily battle to keep her in contact with the world. Almost every day Sarada would lose body consciousness and withdraw into the Self. Each time she did it she would say that she no longer wanted her body and that she was going to give it up. Each time Swamy would have to revive her to keep her alive.

His strategy was to try and get her interested in the outer world so that her body consciousness could be sustained. It was a difficult task; Sarada was now completely without thoughts and this made it almost impossible to interest her in anything. It was only her continuing love for Swamy that kept her alive. Each time she tried to carry out her plan to give up the body, tears would come to his eyes and he would beg her to stay. When this happened she would feel such love for him that she would be no longer capable of severing her link with the body and the world.

Swamy kept her busy by making her play with dolls and by making her construct miniature parks and gardens in his compound. Even though she wanted to obey Swamy's orders she was unable to keep her attention on these play activities for more than a few minutes at a time. The futility of all human activity would suddenly strike her and she would again announce to Swamy that she wanted to give up her body.

After about a year the tide began to turn. The intervals between Sarada's periodic withdrawals into the Self became longer and longer and she finally began to be capable of keeping her attention on the mundane events of everyday life.

# 17

# MATHRU SRI SARADA TODAY

In the years that have passed since Saradamma realised the Self her liking for bodily existence has not increased, but since Swamy wants her to stay alive, she has decided that out of love for him she will retain the body.

Her realisation has had a strong churning effect on her body and it is rare for a month to pass without her being afflicted by some form of sickness. She has had a long period of continuous fevers, another long period of stomach pains, an irritating skin allergy, jaundice and frequent bouts of diarrhoea. A few years ago, when Saradamma was suffering from a severe burning sensation in her face, Swamy remarked:

"Some people say that it is necessary to have a strong body for Self-realisation. This is not so. All one needs for realisation is a pure one-pointed mind. However, if the body is not strong it will not survive realisation because the death of the 'I' precipitates a strong churning of the nervous system. This happened to both Saradamma and me, and we are both now experiencing a wide variety of body pains."

Not all her complaints can be attributed to what Swamy calls 'the churning of the nervous system'. If devotees get sick or feel pain, then Saradamma's body will often experience the same disease or pain. She even experiences pain when she comes into contact with the mental impurities of her devotees:

"The *jnani's* body automatically absorbs devotees' mental impurities. If some people with bad minds touch me, or even approach me, I feel a burning or a pain. Once, when a woman came here, I felt so sick and dizzy that I felt that I was going to die."

In 1978, after a long series of arguments, Swamy finally told the Old Woman to leave the ashram; since that time Saradamma has been spared a continuing confrontation with her. Swamy told the Old Woman that she was welcome to return if she would give up her fights with him and Saradamma and devote herself to meditation instead, but the offer was not accepted. Nowadays she lives in a small house in front of the ashram gate and she continues her



campaign against Swamy and Saradamma by occasionally trying to dissuade new visitors from entering the ashram. She has also started to spread malicious stories about Swamy and Saradamma in the nearby village. Since she is Swamy's mother many people take these stories seriously; over the last few years there has been a noticeable drop in the number of local people who visit the ashram.

Prior to her Self-realisation Saradamma tended to be shy and reserved, and she rarely spoke to anyone. Nowadays she plays the part of a complete extrovert; she spends a large part of each day laughing and playing like a five-year-old child. This playfulness arose as she was trying to maintain an interest in the world to please Swamy. For several years after her realisation, if she remained quiet and still for any length of time, she tended to withdraw into the Self and lose body consciousness. She discovered that playing childrens' games with devotees was a good antidote for this. By trial and error she discovered that other effective antidotes included listening to music and stories on the radio, reading childrens' books, cooking, sewing, gardening and embroidery. In the last three or four years Saradamma's ability to maintain body consciousness has greatly improved and she has recently found that she can function quite normally in the world without recourse to a continuous round of activities.

Saradamma compares this tendency to go into *samadhi* with the intensive periods of Self-absorption that both Ramana Maharshi and Lakshmana Swamy went through after their respective realisations.

> Both Ramana Maharshi and Swamy spent a long time without body consciousness after they realised the Self. They both passed through this state and then went on to lead normal lives. After my own realisation I also kept going into a deep *samadhi* but Swamy wouldn't let me stay in it because he knew that if I was allowed to stay in this state without interruption I might give up the body completely and die. Now, after six years, these *samadhi* periods are less and less frequent and I am functioning normally nearly all the time.

In the first years after her realisation Saradamma showed little interest in anything except playing. Her extreme youth, her tendency

to play all day and her frequent emotional reactions challenged the preconceptions of those who thought that *jnanis* ought to behave in a particular way. Swamy told all newcomers to the ashram during this period about Saradamma's spiritual career and her Self-realisation, but many of them were unable to accept the fact that she had realised the Self.

In 1982, when I first started to collect material for this book, I recorded a few of Swamy's comments on Saradamma's realisation and behaviour. Some of the statements are no longer applicable but I have included them because they are an interesting account of Saradamma's state at that time.

> The *Upanishads* say, "He realises the Self whom the *Atman* chooses". The Self chose Sarada. The selection is not random. The Self or the Guru chooses only those devotees whose minds are pure, who are overflowing with love and devotion and who have an intense longing for the Self. I selected Sarada when she was sixteen. I could see from her eyes that her mind was pure and that her devotion was total and complete. Knowing that such a devotee could realise the Self within a short time, I adopted her as my daughter and allowed her to come and stay with me. Within three years she realised the Self.

---

Before her realisation Sarada said that she wanted to serve me for the rest of her life. Now that she has realised the Self the roles have become reversed because she is so weak. I have to take care of her in order to keep her interested in staying in the body. Sometimes she gets angry with me, goes into *samadhi*, and says that she will give up the body. I told her that the scriptures say that it takes 21 days to give up the body in this fashion. Sarada said that this was nonsense and that she could give up her body in half an hour if she wanted to.

After her realisation I at first thought that she would be my successor here. I thought that after I died she would stay here and teach devotees. I soon discovered that she had no interest in teaching and that she only wanted to play all day.

Although she is not teaching in any formal way, it is still beneficial to be near her. When devotees are near her their minds are being automatically cleaned and purified. Make friends with her and play with her. To be in the company of a *jnani* is a rare opportunity to make spiritual progress. Don't underestimate her; she is the Self and she can transmit the power of the Self to anyone who loves her or surrenders to her.



Anything which helps to keep the thought of an enlightened one constantly in one's mind is good. Laughing and playing with an enlightened one is a valid and effective form of *sadhana*.

---

Although Sarada has realised the Self she spends all her time playing. Even though she sometimes appears to get angry this reaction does not disturb the *sahaja* state which is her real Self. It is difficult for many people to accept her as an enlightened one. She will not answer spiritual questions because she knows that the Self is beyond words. She plays all day, wears good-quality clothes and appears to have frequent emotional reactions. A *jnani* would only have to look at her once to know that she had realised the Self, but ordinary devotees have doubts because they cannot see beyond her personality.

---

A *jnani* does not care what others think of him. He knows that he is the Self, and nothing can shake him from that knowledge. Sometimes I tell Sarada, "How will people recognise you as an enlightened one if you spend all your time playing?", and she usually replies, "Don't care, don't care". And then she carries on playing. A *jnani* is not interested in name or fame. Some people have tried to get me to write a book, but I have no interest in such things. Knowing that I am the Self is enough for me.

---

The leaders of different religions are filled with self-importance. They sit on great thrones and have a regiment of followers to back them up in anything they say and do. They all like being given honour and respect. Look at Sarada. If she sat on a gold and silver throne people would come, bow down and worship her. Instead she plays and behaves like an

ordinary person, so most people ignore her. The earth is her throne, the sky is her roof and the stars are her lights. In fact the whole world is her throne, but people do not recognise this because they only see her with their minds. Ramana Maharshi used to play with children when he lived in Virupaksha Cave, and very few people recognised his greatness then. It is the same with Sarada now.

Saradamma's behaviour has changed dramatically in the years that have passed since Swamy made these comments. She has now assumed responsibility for the spiritual welfare of all the devotees in the ashram; she has formally taken on the role of Guru and she now devotes a large portion of her time to teaching devotees. Swamy's fears about her not wanting to teach, and not wanting to be his successor, have proved to be unfounded. Saradamma herself has described this great change:

> During the first years after my realisation I didn't care about anything. Everything was a game and I played with people the way other people play with dolls. Now I don't play so much and I am starting to take an interest in devotees. I used to see devotees' minds in the first years after realisation, but I never took any interest in them except to use the information I saw to play games with them. Now I see the same minds and I see how much devotees need help and I am doing everything in my power to help them. Before, I used to like playing all day. I still like playing now, but I am happiest when I feel a strong current of love or devotion flowing from a devotee. Nowadays I am less interested in people who want to play all day, and more interested in people who can sustain a good level of devotion.
>
> When you first came here [1982] I didn't care much about looking after devotees. Then I saw that it was a big job for Swamy, looking after all the devotees here and trying to bring down their egos, so I decided to help him. God has given me this work.

Unlike Swamy, Saradamma is happy to spend several hours each day with the devotees in the ashram. Most of the time she talks to devotees in small informal gatherings. These can take place anywhere but her favourite spots seem to be the Ramana Mandir, a Dakshinamurti shrine which has recently been constructed under an ashram banyan tree, and the veranda of the bookstore. She also conducts formal *bhajans* and performs *pujas* in the mandir and at the Dakshinamurti shrine. The *bhajans* provide an indication of how much her body consciousness has stablised in the last few years. For three or four years after her realisation she was unable to listen to any kind of religious music without slipping off into *samadhi*.



Some people find it strange that Saradamma should still perform *pujas*. When she is asked about this her usual response is that there is no one else available to perform them regularly and properly. She is something of a perfectionist when it comes to *pujas*, and she will often spend an hour or more preparing the various images that are to be worshipped. All the devotees enjoy her *pujas* because they feel that that she is transmitting her grace in this way. They particularly like receiving *vibhuti*, *kum-kum* and *prasad* from her own hands.

Saradamma has always been willing to talk about her experience of the Self and about her *sadhana*, but until recently she was more reticent about discoursing on other topics. This has now changed. For about two years now she has been making a serious attempt to teach devotees by answering their spiritual queries and by giving simple discourses on various aspects of Sri Ramana's and Swamy's teachings.

Although Saradamma is now willing to talk about spiritual matters she attaches little importance to her verbal teachings. She prefers instead to use the power of the Self to clean and purify devotees' minds. Sometimes she helps Swamy to do this during his formal *darshans*, but more frequently she uses this power by herself when she is sitting with groups of devotees.

Saradamma usually attends Swamy's *darshans*, and although she often seems to take little interest in them, she sometimes secretly helps to still the assembled devotees' minds.

> Sometimes I help Swamy during *darshan*. When Swamy looks at a devotee he is using the power of the Self to turn the devotee's mind inward and make it go back to its source. Sometimes the devotee's mind gets frightened and tries to escape from Swamy's grip. When this happens I look into the devotee's eyes and help Swamy to get a firm grip on it. It is a bit

like handling a frightened rabbit. With only one pair of hands the rabbit may wriggle and escape, but with two pairs of hands it is much easier to control.

Sri Lakshmana uses the power of the Self in a direct, overt way and devotees often leave his presence with waves of peace and stillness flooding their being. Saradamma is more subtle and devotees are often not aware that she is using this power on them. In informal gatherings of devotees she will frequently look into someone's eyes and effect what she calls a cleaning process. Saradamma maintains that the mind must be purified before it can subside into the Self; she further maintains that when she looks into a devotee's eyes in a particular way, the power of the Self purifies the devotee's mind, even if he is not aware of it. She calls this process 'cleaning the mind', and in attempting to describe the process she says that she pulls the impurities of the mind out through the eyes. It is all done in a most discreet manner; unless she tells them, devotees are rarely aware that they are being constantly cleaned by the silent power of the Self.

There are many other aspects of Saradamma's teachings which are well worth discussing, but these will all be explained in the final section of the book.

Like Sri Lakshmana, Saradamma spends virtually all her time in the ashram. Apart from occasional visits to Nellore or Bangalore for medical trentment she rarely leaves the ashram except to accompany Swamy on his trips to Arunachala.

The holy mountain of Arunachala played a crucial role in her spiritual development. Nowadays, she usually visits the mountain about once a year. She still feels a great love for Arunachala; in its proximity she seems to be infused with an abundance of physical energy. She likes to go to the summit at least once on each visit and she manages to do *pradakshina* of the mountain almost every other day. Her physical metamorphosis there is quite startling. In Gudur she finds it too painful to walk more than a few yards without sandals, but on Arunachala she can scramble barefooted over the rocks for hours without experiencing any pain or tiredness. Once, when I accompanied her to the summit, she took the direct route from Skandashram, which at times is nearly vertical. Even though it was the hottest part of the day she managed to maintain such a fast pace, even without footwear, that most of the people



who accompanied her were left trailing in her wake. When I asked her about this physical transformation she said, "I love Arunachala as my father and Arunachala loves me back in return. Whenever I am here I feel his love flowing into me. He gives me the power to run around all day without feeling any pain. Whenever I am here I can feel that he is looking after me and protecting me."

Whenever she climbs to the peak she always does a *puja* there as a token of her love and affection for Arunachaleswara, the subtle form and presiding deity of Arunachala, and whenever she travels away from the ashram she always carries a small rock from Arunachala in her bag.

Her relationship with Arunachala is unique, for while she regards the mountain as her father, she regards everyone else in the world, including Sri Lakshmana and Sri Ramana, as her children. The title 'Mathru' which Swamy gave her after her realisation means 'mother'; she has lived up to this title by showering a motherly love on everyone who has approached her for spiritual advice and help. This transmission of love forms the core of her teachings. The way that she experiences and transmits this love will be outlined in greater detail in the fourth and final section of the book.

# PART FOUR
## Mathru Sri Sarada: Teachings

# INTRODUCTION

For several years after her realisation Mathru Sri Sarada felt no inclination to teach. Although she spent a lot of time in the ashram with devotees, she neither gave formal *darshan* like Swamy, nor was she inclined to answer spiritual questions. The following comments, recorded in 1982, illustrate her attitude to teaching at that time.

> I am not interested in talking about philosophy or in answering spiritual questions. I can only talk about my experiences before realisation and my experience of the Self afterwards. But even this has little attraction for me. Most of the time the impulse to talk about such things is absent. When people ask such questions I either stay silent or talk about something else.
>
> Sometimes people come here and try to question me and I tell them, "If you want to realise the Self then meditate in silence. Talking to me will not help you." Other people just come to test me in an attempt to find out if I have really realised the Self or not. I usually tell such people, "I don't care what you think of me. Your beliefs and opinions do not affect me." If they persist in questioning me then I get angry with them, and that usually gets rid of them.

Her attitude has mellowed since then and she is now more willing to talk about spiritual matters with devotees. However, such talks are limited by two considerations:

1) She feels that it is unproductive for devotees to look for verbal answers to their spiritual problems;
2) She often remains silent when questions are asked, even if she knows the answer, because she says that the Self 'consumes' the question without supplying an appropriate answer.

She spoke about both these factors during one of her recent visits to Arunachala. Swamy had just spent about half an hour answering questions, some of them rather aggressive, from devotees. Sara-

damma waited till Swamy and all the questioners had left and then made the following comments:

So many people today had so many doubts. Swamy answered them all like a mirror, each answer reflecting the state of mind of the questioner. As I listened I knew that the questions had no validity and the answers no real truths because the truth cannot be expressed in words. I listened to all those words and I knew that none of them were true, not even Swamy's. The words are not real, none of you here is real, the world is not real; nothing is real except the Self.

Dakshinamurti had the right idea: he just kept quiet when people tried to question him. Swamy can answer all these philosophical questions but I cannot do this. When someone asks me a question I know the answer but I cannot express it in words. The answer to most questions is the experience of the Self and this cannot be communicated verbally. When people ask me such questions the Self swallows up the question and no answer comes out. I cannot force an answer to come out because there is no 'I' to do it with. Answers either come automatically or not at all. Usually they do not come at all so I just remain silent.

When I first came to Swamy I had good devotion and good meditation, but when the fights started with his mother I lost my equanimity and my head was filled with thoughts and doubts. I couldn't meditate for a long time until one day I finally resolved to surrender all my doubts and thoughts to Swamy. After this, each time a doubt or thought came, I would say, "This is not my problem, this is Swamy's problem". Then I would mentally give it to him. After that my mind was much more peaceful. When doubts and thoughts came I would give them to Swamy, and all the time I would be a witness to the whole process. All sorts of things came up in my mind: desires for *siddhis*—I wanted to fly at one point—long periods of *tamas* and vivid recollections of my early life. I remained detached from all of them by surrendering them to Swamy.

This is what these people who came this morning should do. Instead of filling their minds with doubts and answers to doubts they should surrender them all to God and be at peace.



To do this, faith in the Guru, or God, and love for him, are essential. Without faith and love such surrender is impossible.

Despite having deep reservations about the usefulness of answering devotees' questions, she now regularly gives short talks on spiritual topics. Sometimes they are quite spontaneous and sometimes they are in answer to a devotee's question. Virtually all the quotations in this section originated in this way.

Saradamma's English is very rudimentary; she has a limited vocabulary and she pays little or no attention to the rules of grammar. Despite this, her English is very functional and she rarely has problems in communicating her ideas. To give precision and coherence to these ideas I have taken the liberty of putting her statements into normal English. I have tried to retain as much as possible of her conversational style but the grammatical rendering is largely my own. Sri Lakshmana Swamy has verified all the statements in this section and he has translated some of it into Telugu so that Saradamma could check that the transcriptions of her teachings have been accurately recorded.

# 19

# THE EXPERIENCE OF THE SELF

Saradamma frequently stresses that the Self cannot be described in words, but on many occasions she tries to describe the indescribable. The first account in this chapter was written by Saradamma herself in Telugu only ten days after her realisation. It is a glowing account of the *jnani's* experience of the Self.

*Saradamma*: When I opened my eyes after realisation there was only peace inside and out. I knew that I was the Self and that when I uttered the word 'I', this 'I' meant only the Self.

Even though I may see, I am not seeing; even though I may hear, I am not hearing; even though I may talk I am not talking. When I wake up I am not really waking and when I sleep I am not really sleeping. Sleep, waking and dream are passing before the Self but they cannot touch it. Whatever I may do I am not doing it. I have no sin and no virtue, no sleep and no waking, for I am always in the state of *sahaja samadhi.* Whatever I may do I am always in that state.

If there is a mind then there is a world. If there is no mind then there is no world and no body. There is nothing except the Self and the Self has no name and no form. It is eternal peace. I am ever content.

I have been able to gain the most valuable thing in the world, for all the riches in the world cannot buy or balance the Self. Even though I did not know that it was possible to get it I attained it, for without my knowing it, the Self killed the 'I'.

Everything is the Self and nothing is apart from it; this is my experience and I do not slip from that state. I am shining as the Self and there is no doubt about my experience.

*Since her Self-realisation Saradamma's link with her body and the world has been very tenuous and unstable; on many occasions she has withdrawn into the Self and completely lost bodily and worldly consciousness. She calls these withdrawals 'going into* samadhi'. *Because of the misleading connotations of the word* samadhi, *I have substituted*



*the expression 'Self-absorption' in the following description of these periodic withdrawals.*

*Saradamma*: Although my experience of the Self never varies, sometimes awareness of the body and the world fluctuates. I have no interest in keeping this body and sometimes I go into a state of complete Self-absorption where the body and the world cease to exist. This body is a useless appendage for me. The Self does not need a body and sometimes the feeling arises, "Why should I keep it anymore? Every day it needs feeding, washing and clothing. It is a sick weak body, full of pain. Why should I prolong its existence?"

When these feelings about the body arise, or when there is a great pain, then I withdraw into the Self. Sometimes I also do it if I am by myself and I feel an urge to dive deep into the peace and bliss of the Self. On these occasions I close my eyes. Then I direct attention within and there is a feeling that I can only describe as 'closing up'. I cannot describe either the process or the experience even in Telugu because one who has not realised the Self cannot possibly understand it.

There are several stages or levels of absorption which I can withdraw to. In the first few stages there is a partial loss of body consciousness and the body feels like an inert lump of stone. All pain and touch sensations disappear but I can still hear what people are saying, and with a little effort I can still manage to speak to them. In these first few levels it is relatively easy to open the eyes and resume normal body consciousness again, but as I withdraw more and more, it gets progressively more and more difficult to reverse the process. After a long or deep period of Self-absorption it is sometimes very difficult to open the eyes and direct attention outwards rather than inwards; it often takes many attempts before I finally succeed.

These periods of Self-absorption are so attractive that Swamy often has to plead with me to get me to come out of them. He knows that if I stay in this state for a long time there is a possibility that I might give up the body.

The experience of peace, bliss and self-sufficiency is the same whether I am absorbed in the Self or not, but when I am freed from the shackles of the body, and when I know that in that state I need nothing, I am often most unwilling to resume body consciousness again.

*Saradamma usually describes her experiences of the Self by using such words as 'peace', 'bliss' and 'love'. In the following brief exchange she reaffirms that her experience of the Self is continuous and asserts that its real nature is peace and bliss.*

*Saradamma*: I am always shining as the Self. I am always peace and bliss and nothing can shake me from that state. If I appear to be angry or sad it is only so in the eyes of other people. To me these images are merely emotions which appear and disappear on the screen of the ever-peaceful Self.
*Question*: Do you always experience the bliss of the Self, the *ananda*?
*Saradamma*: Always! Always! In fact I don't experience it, I am it. I am that *ananda*, it is I.

*In this quotation Saradamma makes a brief reference to her emotional states. When she elaborates on this theme she says that the Self has no emotions of its own and that her apparent emotions are merely reflections of the feelings of the people around her. In the two quotations which follow she first explains how this reflecting process works and then goes on to talk about her real nature, which is pure love.*

*Saradamma*: I am just a mirror that reflects and magnifies what is going on around me. If people are a little angry with me then I am very angry with them. If people give me a little love, then a great flow of love goes back in return. It is not ordinary love, it is the power of the Self; whoever receives it is purified by it. When a devotee thinks of me in a loving way I am immediately aware of it, distance does not matter. I do not choose whom to love or how much love to give. The amount of love I send out depends entirely on the amount of love I am given. Ramana Maharshi once said that the grace of the Self is like an infinite ocean. If you approach the ocean with a cup, you can only take away a cupful; if you approach it with a bucket you can only take away a bucketful. This is exactly how it is with me. I am willing to give my full love to anyone who wants it, but the devotee must initiate the process by loving me first. The Self does not choose whom to love; it only gives love to those who love it.

It is the nature of the Self that it always gives more love than it receives. Sometimes, giving so much love causes a weakness in the body. At times I have found myself saying, "Arunachala, why do you make me love this person?", but I cannot stop the flow. If a devotee really loves me then that love causes the grace of the Self to flow.



---

*Saradamma*: It is my nature to love. I am love itself. I am overflowing with love and I want to give it all the time. I cannot stop myself from giving this love. Swamy sometimes tells me to be careful; he says that devotees who tell me that they love me this year may have completely forgotten about me by the following year. I know from my own experience that this is true, but even with Swamy's words 'Be careful' ringing in my ears, I cannot stop the love from flowing.

*When she is talking about the Self Saradamma often calls it 'the Heart'. Usually she uses this term as a synonym for the Self but sometimes she also uses it to indicate the Heart-centre on the right side of the chest. This centre is the one which Swamy spoke about as being the source of the 'I'-thought. In the following conversations she talks about this centre and her experience of it both before and after her Self-realisation.*

*Question*: I heard Swamy talking about your experience of the Heart-centre. Was this permanent and how did it affect you afterwards?
*Saradamma*: When the mind dies in the Heart it is dead forever. It never rises again. I cannot say what my experience of this state is because it cannot be described in words. But I can say a little about how this affected me. There are now no worries, no fears and no desires; the experience itself I cannot describe.

Before Self-realisation I sometimes went into *samadhi*. As I went into and came out of these states there was an awareness of the Heart-centre on the right side of the chest. However, since realisation, I know that the Heart cannot be located in the body. The Heart is the Self and it is immanent in all things. It is the source of everything and it is neither inside the body nor outside. It is everywhere.

---

*Saradamma*: Just before my Self-realisation I was aware of the 'I'-thought going up and down from the head to the Heart-centre. It went up and down in a flash but I was still aware of it happening.

When my eyes were closed the 'I' would go back to the Heart-centre, but as soon as I opened my eyes it would rush up to the brain again. When the 'I' went back temporarily into the Heart-centre there was a feeling of constriction and tightness here [Saradamma clenched her fist and put it on the bottom right-hand side of her chest as she was saying this]. There was also an intense prickly feeling as if hundreds of ants were running around in the vicinity of the Heart-centre. When the 'I' finally died the feeling of constriction and prickliness stopped and was replaced by an overwhelming feeling of emptiness, openness, peace and bliss. I knew immediately that my 'I' had died forever, and that's why I wanted to give up the body. I knew that nothing mattered anymore because I had realised the Self.

*Question*: I have listened to the tape of you talking while you were in *samadhi*, before you realised the Self. You thought that your 'I' was dead during that period. In what way was your final Self-realisation different? How did you know for sure that your 'I' was really dead when it disappeared for the last time?

*Saradamma*: When I was in *samadhi* the mind only disappeared when my eyes were closed. As soon as I opened them my 'I' would rise up again. Also, during the *samadhi* states there was this great feeling of constriction in the chest. This constriction was caused by the mind which was still existing in a latent form in the Heart. When the mind finally died there was no constriction in the Heart-centre and I was able to open my eyes without the 'I'-thought rising up. As soon as the 'I' died I opened my eyes and looked at Swamy. I knew that I had finally realised the Self* and I knew that Swamy knew it as well. He was so happy that he was crying. Tears were rolling down his cheeks.

*Question*: What was your first reaction to this new experience?

*Saradamma*: There was no reaction. I just knew that I had transcended waking, sleeping and dreaming, that I was the formless Self and that I no longer needed a body. That's why I didn't care about staying alive. I knew that nothing could affect the Self. I

* When Swamy read this sentence out to Saradamma while he was verifying the statements made in this chapter Saradamma made the following remarks: "There was no 'I' which knew that the Self had been realised. The knowing 'I' had totally disappeared and only the Self remained." Swamy asked her if she wanted this line to be altered but Saradamma said that it could stand because there was no way to explain in words how she knew that she had finally realised the Self.



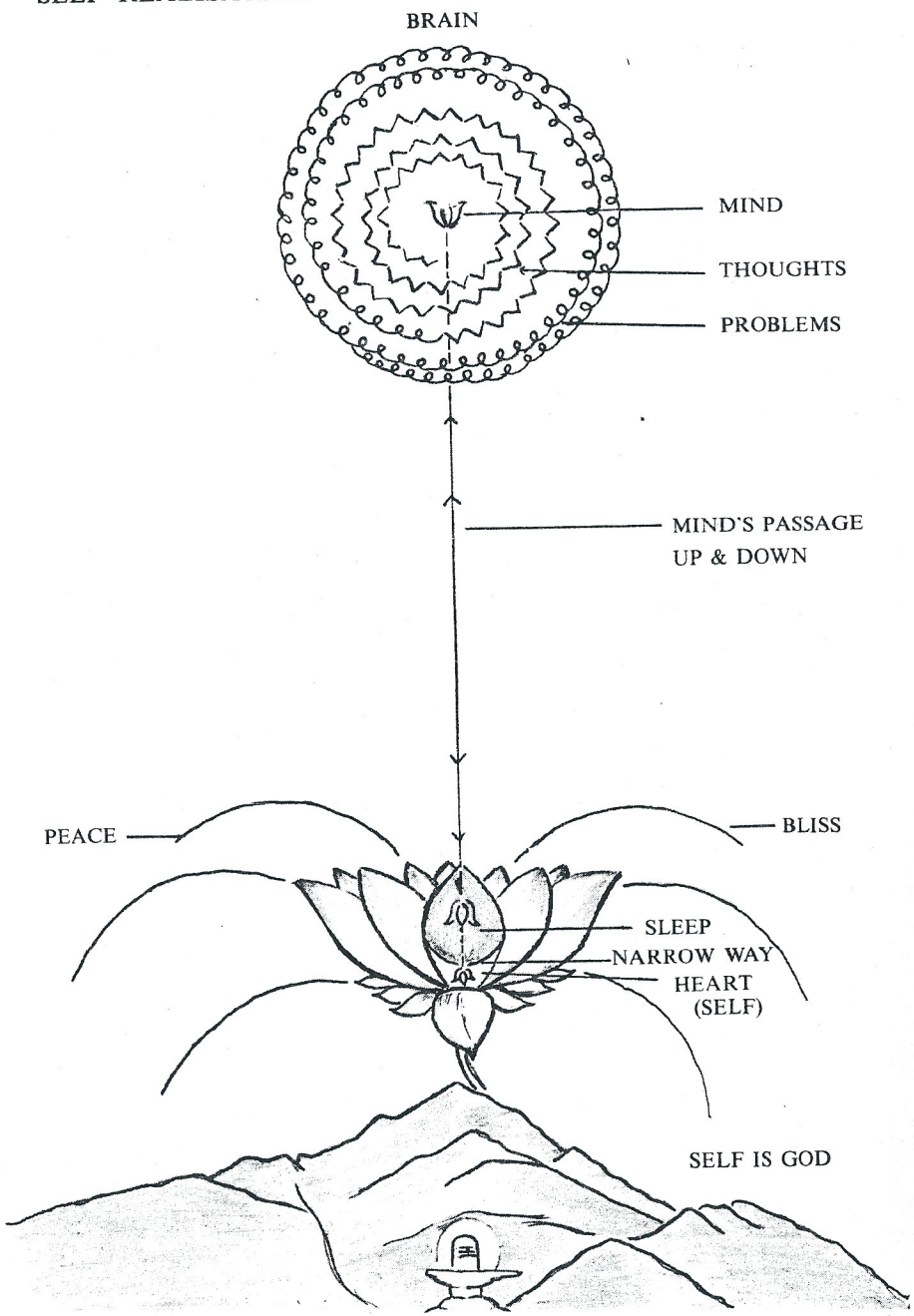
nearly died that day but I didn't care. I knew that I was already beyond birth and death.

I remember opening my eyes, I think it was a few days later in my house in Gudur, and seeing Bala with tears in his eyes. He thought that I was dying. I didn't worry about his tears because I knew that death would never touch me again.

*The diagram on page 194 is a sketch of an embroidered picture which Saradamma made in 1984. The mountain at the bottom of the picture is Arunachala and the lotus flower above it symbolises the Heart. In the central petal of the lotus there are two inverted flowers. The upper one symbolises the mind during sleep. During sleep the mind rests in the Heart, unconsciously experiencing the peace and bliss of the Self. Just before waking, the mind rises to the brain in a split second. In its rising form it is the pure 'I'-thought, uncontaminated by any other thoughts, but when it reaches the brain it starts to accumulate thoughts and perceptions. Saradamma says that at first the thoughts are very simple: "I am lying in bed", "I must get up", "I must go to the bathroom" etc.. These simple thoughts and perceptions are represented by the zig-zag line which spirals outwards from the 'I'-thought (the upward-facing flower at the centre of the spiral). Within a short space of time the mind starts to make more complex calculations: "I must do this today", "Have I got time to eat before I go to work?" etc.. These thoughts about the problems of everyday living are represented by the thicker curly line which continues the outward spiral of the mind. The strength, density and continuity of all these thoughts and problems obscures the underlying experience of the Self. At the end of each day sleep comes and the mind sinks back into the Heart. Although the mind rests in the Heart during sleep, it is only dimly aware of the peace and bliss that prevails there. Saradamma compares this limited amount of peace to the small amount of moonlight that one can see while one is standing under the thick foliage of a tree. This small amount of peace is just sufficient to make sleeping a very pleasant experience, but it cannot be compared to the peace and the bliss that one experiences when the mind consciously sinks into the Heart.*

*At the bottom of the central petal of the Heart lotus there is a small hole. Saradamma says that when the mind passes through this hole Self-realisation occurs. When one is in* samadhi *or deep meditation, the conscious mind sinks into the Heart and remains just outside the*

SELF REALISATION






*small gateway. As she was explaining this diagram to me Saradamma said that when the mind is just outside the opening one can feel a strong sucking force pulling it towards the hole. She says that the mind is afraid of this force, and that when it feels it, it usually moves away from the hole and tries to escape to the brain The mind has good reason to be afraid: when it goes through the hole the Self completely destroys it and Self-realisation results. In the original embroidered picture the sleeping and waking mind-flowers were white whereas the dead mind, below the gateway, was coloured black to symbolise its total extinction.*

*This explanation was given to me by Saradamma. Sri Lakshmana also contributed to the commentary with the following remarks:*

*Swamy*: In sound sleep the mind (the 'I') enters into the Heart but it remains in an ignorance of the Self which cannot be described in words. Just before waking, the mind, which is the 'I'-thought, rises from the Heart to the brain in a split second through a passage called the *amrita nadi*. Then the mind experiences the world through the five senses and thinks that it is real.

In Self-realisation, the pure mind, without thoughts and problems, returns back to the Heart-cave through this same passage. As the mind tries to pass through the narrow way, the Self pulls the mind towards it and kills it.

After the death of the 'I' the Self will remain, one without a second; it is eternal peace and bliss. As there is no mind, there is no world, no birth and no death. Just as ornaments are not apart from the gold they are made of, even so, the world is not apart from the Self. As the Self is all-pervading, it is beyond time, directions and the three states of waking, dreaming and sleeping.

*The knowledge that one has transcended the waking, dreaming and sleeping states is one of the classic hallmarks of Self-realisation. The* jnani's *awareness of the Self is the same in all three states. This means that even while his body sleeps he maintains full Self-consciousness.*

*Saradamma*: I used to sleep a lot when I was young, but now I hardly need any sleep at all. Three or four hours a night is usually enough for me. Swamy is the same. Even when I sleep it is not the unconscious experience that most people mean when they talk about sleep. If somebody asks me a question I can answer it while I am still asleep. The Self never loses consciousness and it is always

aware of the three states of waking, dreaming and sleeping passing before it, without being affected by them.

*Saradamma had a brief experience of the Self on a number of occasions before her final realisation but she is rather sceptical of devotees who claim to have had similar experiences.*

*Question*: Some people claim to have had brief experiences of the Self. Is this very common?
*Saradamma*: Many people make such claims but I doubt if more than a few of them have had a genuine experience of the Self. Because most people have never had a direct experience of the Self they think that blissful or peaceful states of mind are glimpses of the Self. The only real experience of the Self occurs when the mind enters the Heart.

Imagine a cave with a fierce demon in it. If you go in to investigate, one of three things may happen: the demon may kill you, you may escape through the cave entrance, or you make break your head on the cave roof while you are trying to escape and die as a result. Taking the mind into the Heart-cave is a little like this. Either the Self destroys the mind completely, or the mind enjoys the bliss of the Self for a while before escaping to the brain again, or the strain of the experience is too much for the body and death results. In the last case there will probably be a rebirth in one of the higher worlds.

Most people who claim to have experienced the Self have not even taken their minds near to the entrance of the Heart-cave. And even if the mind does go into the Heart, there is still an 'I' which is experiencing the bliss of the Self. The true experience of the Self only happens when the mind is completely absent, either temporarily, as in *samadhi*, or permanently, as in Self-realisation. Both of these experiences are very rare.

It is very difficult to make the mind go into the Heart. Mostly it is too afraid of its own death to even approach the entrance. The mental experiences of peace, bliss and stillness which devotees claim to experience usually take place outside the Heart. They are all in the mind. People who think that these experiences are the reality of the Self are only deluding themselves.

*In one of the earlier quotations in this chapter Saradamma stated that emotions such as anger and sorrow do not really affect her; she said that they are only images that come and go on the screen of the Self. What holds true for emotions applies equally to her behaviour and her actions. She is the Self and not the body and she is therefore not touched by any actions that the body may appear to perform. The following words were spoken as a rejoinder to some devotees who claimed that* jnanis *ought to behave in a way that is recognisably saintly or spiritual.*



*Saradamma*: I am not obliged to conform to other peoples' opinions and prejudices. A Self-realised person is one whose 'I' is dead, not one who behaves in a prescribed way. My experience of the Self is unchanging and it is not affected by any of the activities that I may indulge in. I am not seeking approval for my actions, nor do I care if people disapprove. The Self is not the body and it is not touched by other peoples' thoughts.

You can never tell a *jnani* by what he says and does. There is an old story which illustrates this. Krishna and Arjuna were travelling together and they visited the house of a very bad man who had managed to accumulate a lot of money. They were treated very badly there but when they left Krishna blessed the man and said that his fortune would increase even more. Next they visited a poor man whose only possession was a cow. He treated them very hospitably but when they left Krishna blessed the man by saying that his cow would die. Arjuna was mystified by this behaviour and he asked Krishna for an explanation. Krishna replied that the rich man was very attached to his money and that by giving him more money he was really cursing him because he was strengthening his attachments. The poor man had only one attachment, his cow, and so Krishna blessed him by taking his cow away from him.

*Jnanis* often behave in unpredictable or unexpected ways, but you should never judge them by the standards of ordinary human behaviour.

*Saradamma frequently states that she has no mind and that the realised person is one whose mind is dead. Saradamma and Swamy both behave quite normally; looking at them it is sometimes hard to imagine how they perform all their daily tasks without a mind. I once asked Saradamma about this. I pointed out that she and Swamy seemed to have good memories and that neither of them seemed to have any difficulty in solving problems that for most people would require a little*

*thought. I further pointed out that both she and Swamy appear to think and take decisions in the same way that everyone else does. I asked her, "How are these observations reconciled by the statement that you have no mind?". Saradamma replied, "Before realisation all these mental functions were performed with the inert mind by the power of the Self. Now everthing is done by the Self. The mind has ceased to exist and now everything that needs to be done is done automatically by the Self."*

*On a more recent occasion she was even more emphatic about not having a mind:*

*Saradamma*: I have no mind. *Jnani's* have no mind. Whatever people write in books about *jnanis* keeping a little mind is not true. Ramana Maharshi sometimes used to say that the *jnani's* mind is like the moon in daylight, barely visible and not doing anything useful because the sun (the Self) is providing all the light. This is not true and he only said this to people who found it hard to accept the fact that the *jnani* has no mind at all. Similarly, some books say that the *jnani* still has some *prarabdha karma* [destiny to be completed in the present life] and that the body will continue its allotted and destined functions till it dies. The *jnani* has no *prarabdha karma* because he is not the body. I am not afraid to say these things even though it is difficult for many devotees to understand.

The mind is just an inert machine which only appears to work because the current of the Self animates it. When the mind dives into the Heart and is destroyed by the Self you realise that it was the Self which was animating the mind, and that without the Self the mind would have been inert and totally useless.

Everything is done by the Self: looking, turning the head, talking, walking etc.. Before realisation you imagine that it is the mind or the body that is doing all this, but after realisation you know that it is the Self that does everything.

*Saradamma asserts that the world is nothing but the mind. The logical inference from this is that* jnani's *do not perceive the world at all since they no longer have a mind. Saradamma confirms that this is so in the following exchange:*

*Question*: You make two statements: one, the world is nothing but the mind, and two, the realised person has no mind. If both these



statements are true how do you see the world since you no longer have a mind?

*Saradamma*: I don't see the world, I only see the Self. Seeing the Self everywhere I look is such a fundamental property of my being that I sometimes forget that devotees are not also seeing what I am seeing. When this happens it is only when they speak that I am reminded that they all have minds, and that when they look at the world they are only looking at their minds.

*Not having a mind, Saradamma travels through life unencumbered by any mental baggage. The implications of this are sometimes quite surprising.*

*Saradamma*: Sometimes I go to Bangalore and visit my sister who lives there. While I am away from the ashram I completely forget about it because there is no mind to keep reminding me of its existence. When I come back to the ashram it is very strange. Even though everything is familiar, it is almost as if I am visiting the place for the first time. Since I do not have a mind, there is nothing in me to provide continuity with the past. The Self only exists in the present moment, and since it has no residue of the past attached to it, each experience is new and fresh. When I am in my sister's house in Bangalore, that household is all that exists for me. When I am here, only the ashram exists. Wherever I am there is no attachment to the past and no anticipation of the future.

*Before her realisation Saradamma's mind was constantly occupied with thoughts of Swamy. When her mind finally died such thoughts were no longer possible, but the love which generated the thoughts continues to flow:*

*Saradamma*: Before realisation I could not take my eyes off Swamy. I was thinking of him all the time and my mind was always aware of his presence. Since realisation my mind has gone and I now find that I have no impulse to look at him for more than two or three minutes at a time. The thoughts have finished but the love is undiminished; the only difference is that formerly it was mind-love whereas now it is Self-love. The same Self-love flows back from Swamy: Swamy is my Heart and I am Swamy's Heart.

# 20
# TESTS AND TEACHING METHODS

Saradamma is convinced that the many tests that she was subjected to helped her to progress along the path to Self-realisation. Now that she has devotees of her own she has adopted this teaching method to gauge the progress of devotees and to subdue their egos.

*Saradamma*: For realisation, in addition to a pure mind, there must be intense love for the Guru; at the same time one must also fear him. One also needs to be very humble. The Guru will test the devotee many times. If the humility is not there the devotee's ego will react and he or she will fail the test. I was subjected to many tests during my *sadhana*, sometimes to test my love and devotion and sometimes because my ego had reared its head. All the tests were necessary. A devotee may feel that he is in heaven for weeks at a time because of good meditations or because he is feeling much love for the Guru. However, one angry word from the Guru, or a period of being ignored by him, and the heaven dissolves like a mirage. These tests put one's spiritual progress into perspective. They inculcate humility and surrender in the devotee because they make him realise how shaky the foundations of his spiritual attainments are. They keep the ego under control by making the devotee realise his own shortcomings. Only when one's love or equanimity remains firm through all such tests is one ready for Self-realisation.

Some of the tests which Swamy gave me may appear to have been a little cruel or pointless, but one should not have the idea that Swamy was sitting in his room thinking, "I will test Sarada in such and such a way". Swamy is the Self and he has no mind with which to entertain such thoughts. These tests were spontaneous manifestations of the Self. Swamy did not think up these tests. It was the Self which was testing me because I needed to be tested.

Because I realised the Self some people here are now thinking, "Saradamma is testing me". I am not planning and thinking up these tests because there is no thinking and no 'I' to plan. It is only the Self. If I hit a devotee, ignore him or subject him to an apparently humiliating experience, it is only the Self testing the devotee. If the



devotee gets angry or wants to fight back, then the devotee fails the test. Such tests are going on here all the time. The Self witnesses the result of each test and notes how pure, humble and egoless the devotee is. When the mind has been completely purified and such tests are no longer necessary, then the Self consumes and destroys the mind and realisation results.

---

*Saradamma*: If you are always thinking about worldly things your mind becomes dirty. From a spiritual point of view the mind is like a mirror; it is only useful when it is clean. If you keep a mirror outside it will get so covered with dust and mud that you cannot see your face in it. If you keep the mirror inside a cupboard it stays clean and you can use it whenever you need it. When the mind wanders among worldly things a layer of *vasanas* (mental activities) forms on it which prevents it from reflecting or being aware of the light of the Self within. If you stop the mind from wandering and keep it turned towards God, then no outside influences can deposit any *vasanas* on it. This is the mental equivalent of keeping the mirror in the cupboard.

Sometimes you have to use your mind. On such occasions, take it out of the cupboard, let it do its job, and then put it back again. When you don't need to use your mind, put it back in the cupboard by thinking of God, otherwise it will get dirty.

When a devotee first comes to a Guru, the Guru will look at his mind and see all the *vasanas* that have accumulated on its surface. If the devotee stays with the Guru, the Guru will begin to test the devotee to see how strong and genuine his devotion is. These tests come automatically from the Guru and they clean the devotee's mind by removing its imperfections. When God or a Guru tests a devotee, good results always follow.

When the Guru is cleaning the devotee's mind, the devotee will start to experience blissful states. The devotee then thinks that he is making good progress and his ego starts to rise. When the Guru sees this he automatically produces new tests which curb the devotee's rising ego. The devotee is not usually aware that his ego is starting to rise, but the Guru always sees it and takes the appropriate corrective action.

It is much easier for the Guru to catch the ego as it is starting to rise, rather than wait for it to flourish in its full form. The ego is

like a crooked tree. If you catch it when it is small, it is easy to tie a stick to it and straighten it out. If you wait till it has grown big, it is far more difficult to control.

*Saradamma mentioned in the previous chapter that she sometimes appears to get angry. She pointed out that being the Self she cannot really get angry; what appears to be anger is merely a transient image which comes and goes across the screen of the Self. Quite often though, she uses this appearance of anger as a means of purifying devotees' minds.*

*Saradamma*: Sometimes I appear to get angry with devotees, but it is not anger in the way that most people understand the term. If I see a devotee's ego rising I may appear to get angry in order to deflate the ego, but it is not ego anger. When you clean clothes by beating them against a rock you are not angry with the clothes, you are only using a necessary amount of violence to remove the dirt.* Similarly, when I attack a devotee's ego with anger I am attempting to clean and purify the mind in a forceful way. I am not really angry, it only appears to be so.

*Saradamma also uses this apparent anger to inculcate a little fear into devotees' minds since she feels that one should fear the Guru as well as love him.*

*Saradamma*: It is good for the devotee to fear the Guru. I laugh and play with devotees but I also sometimes get angry with them. If they get too familiar with me over a long period of time, their egos flourish. An occasional outburst of anger is always good for curbing the ego, and since devotees never know when such outbursts are coming, the mere threat of such an outburst keeps them all apprehensive. This is good. Worry is good in devotees as it makes them think about God more.

A devotee may make a joke at my expense and I may laugh. Another devotee may make a similar joke and I may react with anger. The irrationality of it all, and the inability of devotees to predict what they can safely say or do, keeps everyone on their toes and egos under control. Please understand though that I do not

* This is the commonest way of cleaning clothes in India.



choose whom to get angry with. These outbursts all come spontaneously from the Self; they come because they are necessary for the devotee's spiritual progress. The more angry I am with a devotee the more is my love for him.

Being friends with a *jnani* is difficult; being humble is essential. The power coming from a Self-realised person will bring the ego up. At these times the devotee will see the *jnani* as being angry, but it is only a reflection of the devotee's own inner state.

If the devotee can recognise this and be humble, bringing his ego down, then more grace will flow to him and he will be spiritually cleaned. He will then generate more love for the Guru and more peace will come. If the ego is strong, the Guru will continue to seem angry, the devotee's own mind will be in a state of restlessness, and love for God will not grow.

The anger of the Guru is, in fact, a special form of grace.

*To follow the path that Saradamma followed successfully, one must accept everything that the Guru does or says. Questioning the Guru's actions requires an assertive ego, whereas true surrender requires that one humbly accepts every order and decision of the Guru.*

*Saradamma*: Whatever the Guru does is correct. The Guru is the Self and he cannot do wrong, even though his actions may well appear to be wrong in the sight of the world.

If a devotee sees the Guru's actions as bad and thinks badly of the Guru, bad power will come to the devotee. If you think that whatever the Guru does is correct, then good power will come. If the Guru says jump in a well you should jump, even if you can't swim.

# 21

# THE MIND AND ITS *GUNAS*

Saradamma keeps a close watch on the mental states of all the devotees in the ashram. She sees the fluctuations of peoples' minds very clearly and she often describes them in terms of the three *gunas*. The *gunas*, according to Hindu philosophy, are the three primary qualities of all manifestation; the theory is similar to the yin-yang theory in Chinese philosophy, except that there are three qualities instead of two. The first *guna* is *sattva*, which means purity or harmony, the second is *rajas* (activity and excitability) and the third is *tamas* (inertia or dullness). The mind is usually a mixture of all three *gunas* and its overall state is determined by which *guna* is predominating at any particular time. Saradamma watches these changes taking place and she will often warn devotees if she sees that their minds are becoming too *tamasic* or too *rajasic*. Like Swamy, she feels that a *rajasic* state is superior, from a spiritual point of view, to a *tamasic* state; like him she also insists that the aim of spiritual practice is to make the mind as *sattvic* as possible so that it will easily sink into the Heart.

*Saradamma*: When I first came to Swamy my mind was very *rajasic*. I was always getting angry with him. When he tested me by doubting my devotion, my first reaction was always anger. Although my devotion never wavered, I never meekly accepted his criticism. Slowly, over the years that I was with him, he ground down my ego and the *rajas* was slowly replaced by *sattva*. There is nothing one can do for devotees whose minds are wholly immersed in *tamas* because it is almost impossible to transform a *tamasic* mind into a *sattvic* mind without having *rajas* as an intermediate stage. If the *tamasic* element is not strong, devotion and meditation can eliminate it, but even for this *rajas* is needed.

Sitting for many hours in meditation is not necessarily good. Sometimes excessive meditation just dulls the mind and leaves it in a permanent state of *tamas*. A thought-free state is not necessarily good either because there is a *tamasic* thought-free state in which there is no peace or bliss, only a semi-conscious stupor. No progress is being made when one is in this state.



When one meditates with closed eyes the mind often wanders and has many thoughts; or it grows dull and *tamasic*. If one keeps the eyes open during meditation there are fewer thoughts. It is not necessary to meditate all day. Half an hour in the morning and half an hour in the evening is good enough, providing that you can keep the mind still, quiet and *sattvic*. If you find that you cannot get out of a *tamasic* state when you meditate you should do *japa* or think constantly of the Guru's form.

---

*Question*: When I was at Sri Ramanasramam last year there was an Australian man called Paul who seemed to be permanently in a semi-conscious state. He said that he was meditating all day. He never washed and never went to the toilet; he urinated and defacated inside his clothes. He was difficult to talk to because he was barely conscious and often incoherent. He said that he was meditating and that he wanted to be left alone. Most people thought that he was mad. Eventually a man came from the Australian consulate, took him away, and put him in a mental hospital in Madras. I was told that after a few weeks he became quite normal again.

*Saradamma*: Yes, this sounds like a typical *tamasic* state. The woman who tried to kill me was also absorbed in a *tamasic* state. Such people can appear to be deeply engrossed in meditation, or appear to be full of devotion, but it is all superficial. The *sattvic* thought-free state is quite different. In this state there is peace, bliss and a full awareness of consciousness. This state is difficult to attain and usually lasts only a few minutes. If one can reach this state regularly every day, then it is not necessary to meditate all day long. If you can sustain it for half an hour in the morning and half an hour in the evening then that is all the formal sitting meditation that one needs to do.

---

*Saradamma*: The mind is always a mixture of *rajas*, *tamas* and *sattva*. The components are always changing and one is never wholly *rajasic* or *tamasic*. When I say that someone is *tamasic* or *rajasic* I mean that that is the dominant *guna*. The other two are still present, but they are less noticeable. Pure *sattva*, or *suddha sattva* is not really a state of mind at all; it is only another name for the Self. The *jnani* does not have a mind but one can say that he is perma-

nently in the state of *suddha sattva*. The mind is really only the alternation of *rajas* and *tamas*. When *sattva* predominates it means that the mind has quietened down and that the Self is beginning to manifest.

When one starts to meditate, the dominant *guna* may change frequently. When *rajas* or *tamas* predominate it is often difficult or impossible to meditate properly. When a period of *sattva* comes one should make the most of it and spend as much time as possible in meditation.

---

*Saradamma*: Some people come here thinking that devotion is just a matter of performing certain acts. Sometimes Swamy tells devotees incidents from my *sadhana* and some of them think that all they have to do is behave like I did and then Swamy will give them realisation. These people, for some reason they are always women, break into Swamy's compound, sit on his veranda and announce that they can't live without Swamy and that they are going to stay here permanently. These people know that Swamy tested me many times and that once, as a test, he tried to throw me out of the ashram. When Swamy and I ask them to leave they think, "This is only a test. No matter what Swamy says, no matter how angry he gets, I shall stay here." Swamy only tolerated me doing such things because I was mad with devotion for him. These other people are not real devotees. They may think that they are overflowing with love and devotion, but deep down, their real motive is to impress other people, to let them know that they are Swamy's number one devotee. These people are just a nuisance and their so-called devotion is only a manifestation of their egos.

These people are permanently immersed in *tamas* and it is almost impossible to shake them out of it. Imagine a pot full of water, and then imagine that fitting inside the rim there is a very small pot containing milk. If a fire is lit under the pot the water and the milk will both boil and the boiling milk will pour out over the top of the pot. A casual observer would think that the whole pot was full of boiling milk, whereas in fact it is nearly all water inside. This is how it is with many devotees. They appear to be full of love and devotion, and they may even sincerely believe that they are good devotees, but the devotion is only superficial and there is no real love in their hearts.



Most devotees have *tamasic* minds but it is only those who have no *rajas* who tend to get stuck in the *tamas* state. *Rajas* is a kind of stepping stone to *sattva* and it is therefore always good to have a little *rajas* in one's mental make-up. Of course, *rajas* must also be eliminated, but while it exists it is a useful tool to fight the *tamasic* stupor that many devotees are submerged in.

# 22

# ADVICE TO SPIRITUAL SEEKERS

Devotees often ask Saradamma for help with their *sadhana*. She usually tells such people to surrender unconditionally to the Guru since this was the path which proved to be successful in her own case. In this final chapter Saradamma gives useful hints on how to do this effectively, how to meditate properly, and how to conduct oneself in the world.

*Saradamma*: Many devotees are filled with doubts and questions. They ask a question, get an answer, but this answer produces a new doubt and a new question. And so it goes on. It is not good to have so many doubts and so many questions. If they keep arising in the mind they should all be surrendered to the Guru, unasked. Instead of wondering about the answers to questions, mentally give the questions to the Guru each time they arise.

Neither Swamy nor I had any doubts during our *sadhana*. Swamy had been studying philosophy before he went to see Ramana Maharshi but he never asked any questions, nor did he have any doubts. I never had any either. Swamy sometimes used to talk philosophy to me but I was never interested in what he had to say. Most of the time I didn't even try to understand him. I just kept quiet and absorbed the grace that was coming from his face.

Devotees should be like this. They should try to keep their minds quiet and still. If they want to think about anything at all they should think about God and not about doubts and questions.

When Bala and I were staying with Swamy, Bala was always asking questions. He was never satisfied. He kept on asking questions—"Where does the sun come from? Where do the moon and stars come from? How was the world created? Why was the world created?". There is no benefit to be derived from looking for answers to such questions. It is better to keep the mind quiet and still.

---

*Question*: Is seeing you and Swamy in the mind and being with you in imaginary scenarios beneficial?



*Saradamma*: Yes, this is very good. It is always beneficial to think of Swamy and me. I did this a lot during my *sadhana*.

*Question*: I still have many desires. How shall I try to get rid of them?

*Saradamma*: It is not good to supress desires as that gives them more strength. It is much better to surrender them all to God.

*Question*: How can one do that?

*Saradamma*: By self-enquiry or by replacing the desire with the thought of God. When I was doing my *sadhana* I got rid of such thoughts by fantasising about Swamy. I used to imagine that he was my child and I would spend my time imagining that I was laughing and playing with him in a beautiful garden.

One can get rid of all unwanted thoughts in the same way. For example, you have been working. Then you stop to do something else, but the thoughts about your previous work stay with you. When this happens offer each thought to God as soon as it arises, or just keep the thought of God strongly in your mind so that no other thoughts have a chance to appear.

It is very hard to give up desires; the longer one carries on fulfilling them, the harder it will be to eventually give them up. If one leads an ordinary life and only turns to God in old age, spiritual progress will be very difficult because many desires will come up. These desires will be very strong in old age. However, if one has been thinking of God throughout one's life this habit will continue even through the difficult period of old age.

---

*Saradamma*: To follow the path of love and surrender successfully you must love your Guru without any expectation of a reward. If you are loving me or Swamy because you want realisation, that is not true love, it is exploitation; you are trying to use us to gain an end. One has to love God, the Self or the Guru just for the sake of love. If there is a hidden desire it cannot be called love. The desire for *moksha* [liberation] should be got rid of.

I never wanted realisation during my *sadhana*. I only wanted Swamy. I only wanted to be with him and to think of him all the time. In fact, when Swamy tried to describe the experience of the Self to me I found it most unattractive. I had no desire to be without a mind, to be in a state where I could no longer think about Swamy all the time.

If your motive for surrendering to me is a desire for realisation then you are no better than a monkey who pretends to make friends with a man so he can steal a mango which the man is holding. If a monkey has real love for a man, the man may sense it and give him the mango, but if the monkey's eyes are always on the mango, the man will be aware of it and he will never let the monkey close enough to grab it.

Good devotees are hard to find. Many people come here and say that they are surrendering to me or Swamy, but their devotion is only superficial. When they leave the ashram they soon forget us and many of them never return.

I was prepared to die for Swamy if he asked me to. I surrendered to him body and mind, and I couldn't live without seeing him and thinking of him. I have not come across a devotee who has even a small fraction of the love I had for Swamy. I am prepared to give my full love to anyone who surrenders to me, but even when I give all the love I have I only get partial love and a partial surrender in return. Even if you tell me, "I surrender completely to you", I will not believe it. The Guru can see a devotee's state, his readiness for the spiritual path, his thoughts and the state of his mind. Nothing can be hidden from the Guru.

---

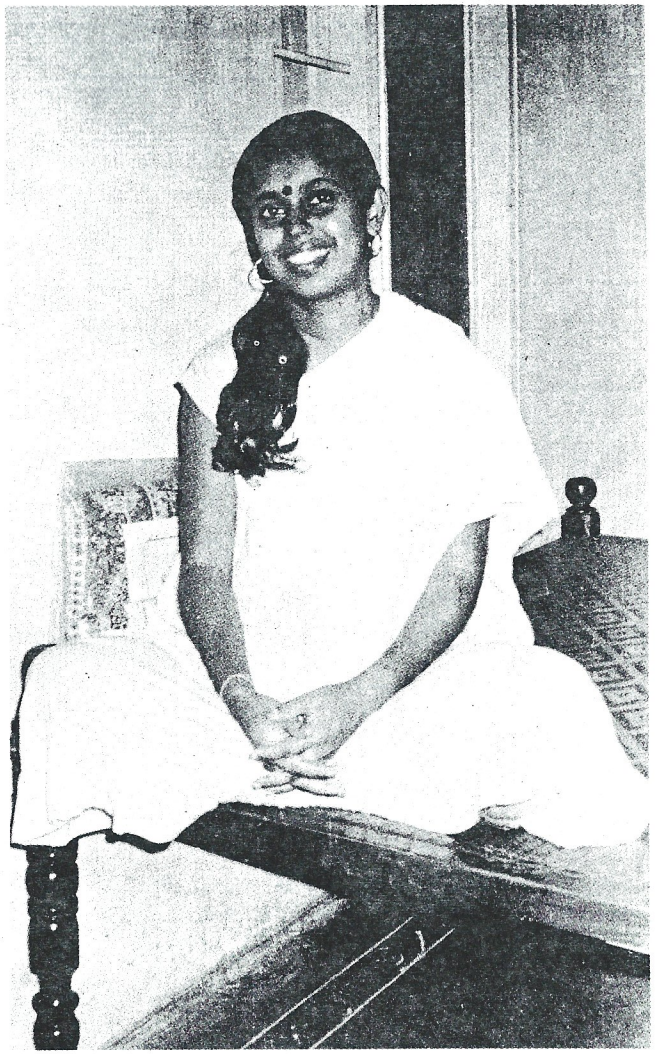
*Saradamma*: Loving your Guru in the hope of getting Self-realisation is wrong. You should not want anything from the Guru except his love.

*Question*: But isn't loving a Guru in the hope that he will love you in return just as bad as loving him because you think that he will give you Self-realisation?

*Saradamma*: No. Wanting the Guru's love makes your own love increase. If you want the Guru's love you must make every effort to think of him all the time. You must try to give him more and more and more of your love. Anything that makes you love your Guru like this is good.

---

*Saradamma*: It is not good to think about realisation as an event in the future. Such things cannot be predicted. One should only be concerned with stabilising oneself in the peace and bliss of the present. Thinking about the future and predicting one's future spiri-



Above and following page: Mathru Sri Sarada today; taken in Swamy's house in November 1986.

tual career are a waste of mental energy. Christopher once asked Swamy if he would realise the Self if he stayed here for three years. Swamy just laughed and said that he was not running a three-year B.A. course in Self-realisation.

Some foreigners who are used to getting everything they want in their own countries come here with the idea that everything, including realisation, can be had for a price. They think that the price is three years or five years of meditation. This attitude is not helpful. They should give up all ideas of gaining anything.

---

*Saradamma*: If you love one person more than another this is not true love; it is an attachment created by desire. To love all things equally, seeing the Self in all of them, is true love. When the Self is realised, and sometimes even before, one can feel this love animating and flowing through the body in the same way that blood flows through the veins and arteries.

It is love which binds the universe together and sustains it. Without love it would be nothing more than a collection of inert matter. It is the same with the human body; without love, or the Self, the body would just be an inert lump.

All love is the same love, but love other than the love of God is a waste. When two people love each other and get married, what are they loving? They are loving each other's minds and bodies. If a man loved the Self in his wife he would not grieve when her body dies because he would know that nothing has really happened to the Self. When two people marry and give all their love to each other they are building a wall around themselves. They have no love left for God or the Self, and because of this they can never see and love the Self, which is immanent in all things. Couples who only love each other can never realise the Self because they are preoccupied with their minds and bodies and have no love left for God. From a spiritual point of view the ideal man-woman relationship is one in which the couple live as brother and sister, and instead of wasting their love on each other, they give it all to God.

---

*Saradamma*: Some people come here because they want their desires to be fulfilled. They come to Swamy with their personal problems and expect him to solve them all. Sometimes they come to

me also. Several women have approached me and asked me to bless them so that they could have a baby. If people try to tell Swamy about their problems during *darshan* he generally ignores them and remains silent. If they are really persistent he usually tells them that all their problems are self-imposed because they have put limitations on their true nature. I don't mind listening to the complaints of such people; I like to give love to everyone. Only if I see in their eyes that they are really bad people do I refuse to see them. Neither Swamy nor I do anything consciously to help these people, but if their devotion is strong, then help may come automatically.

When people bring their personal problems to us it only proves that they have not really surrendered. If they had really surrendered to us, body and mind, then there would be no room for any complaints at all.

---

*Question*: I have sat with several saints and holy people. Sometimes I feel peace and sometimes not. If all these people are in the same state, why does the peace one experiences vary from saint to saint?
*Saradamma*: If these people you had met had all realised the Self, then the power would have been the same in each case. The Self does not vary, it is always the same. If you feel a lot of power coming from a particular saint it is possible that you have a special connection with him. Two equally mature devotees may go to a Guru and one may feel his power and the other may not. The one who feels the power is probably destined to be a devotee of that particular Guru, whereas the other devotee's destiny lies elsewhere.

---

*Saradamma*: Before Self-realisation I used to think how lucky I was to have a great Guru like Swamy, and how lucky I was to feel such great devotion towards him. I can now see that this was just another subtle manifestation of the ego. Thinking that one has a good Guru causes the ego to rise because it makes one think that one is better off than other people who don't have a good Guru.

When one sits in meditation, the ego often rises simply because one is having a good experience. One can become very quiet and still and think, "I am having a good meditation. If I carry on like this I will surely realise the Self in this life." Thinking that one is meditating well is just another manifestation of the ego.

---



*Saradamma*: When a person dies, all the *karma* he has accumulated is carried over into the next life. All of it must be experienced, both the consequences of the good actions and the consequences of the bad actions. The good *karma* does not wipe out the bad *karma*, nor does any amount of *punya* [merit] wipe out even the smallest piece of *papa* [demerit or sin].

Some people say that a person's last thoughts affect his next birth. There is a common belief that if a person dies thinking of God, then he will automatically go to heaven or get a good rebirth. This is not so. If a person has led a bad life and dies saying 'Ram Ram', then he will still have to experience all the consequences of his bad actions. Saying 'Ram Ram' when he dies will not help him at all.

It doesn't really matter how a person dies; it doesn't matter whether he is conscious or unconscious, whether he dies while meditating or while committing sins. If he has not realised the Self he will be reborn again; if he is reborn again he will have to experience the consequences of everything that he has done before.
*Question*: Some people say that the Guru burns up some of the devotee's *karma* so that the devotee doesn't have to experience it. Is this true?
*Saradamma*: If you completely surrender to the Guru, all your *karma* and all your *punya* and *papa* will be instantly burned up and you will be forever free of them. But for this to happen total surrender is required. The Guru cannot take any of your *karma* from you unless you offer it to him as an act of surrender. The initiative must be taken by the devotee. If the devotee willingly offers his whole body and mind to the Guru, the Guru accepts it, the mind dies, and all *karma* dies with it.

---

*Saradamma*: Many people who come here think that Swamy can dispense realisation to anyone he chooses. After my realisation several devotees were angry with him because they felt that since they had been devotees for much longer than I had, they should have been given realisation first. One man who built a thatched hut here even complained to Swamy; he asked him to adopt his daughter and give her Self-realisation as well. Even when I tell such people that realisation must be earned and cannot be dispensed like sweets, still they do not believe me.

When devotees say, "I surrender" or "I want Self-realisation", they may think that this is what they want, but deep down, at an unconscious level, their ego wants to continue indefinitely. When they sit with Swamy in *darshan* and their minds start to sink into the Heart, they panic, and their minds are gripped with a fear of their own extinction. I can see this fear in devotee's eyes and I sometimes notice that they have problems with their breathing as well. The breaths come in short spasmodic gasps, and only when the mind rises again does the breathing resume its normal rhythm. Devotees may think that they want realisation, but their minds are not ready enough or pure enough to stand the shock. People ask for grace to realise the Self, but the grace of the Guru is given in measured quantities, and the quantity never exceeds the devotee's capacity to assimilate it.

---

*Saradamma*: People look at Swamy and me and think that realisation must be relatively easy to achieve because we both realised the Self in a short time. However, we are exceptions. It is rare for someone to have the determination and dispassion that Swamy had during his *sadhana*, and it is equally rare for a devotee to be as God-intoxicated as I was.

Complete surrender or earnest self-enquiry can only be effectively practised by advanced devotees. Even Ramana Maharshi sometimes said that self-enquiry was for ripe souls only. Most people need a long period of purification to get their minds pure enough for total surrender or effective self-enquiry. Devotees ask for grace to realise the Self, but most devotees are nowhere near ready for realisation; if they were given a large amount of grace the shock would kill them. For most people a preliminary period of mind purification, such as can be produced by *japa* or *pranayama* will be most useful.

---

*Question*: I used to repeat a *mantra* but for the last few months I have been practising self-enquiry. Sometimes I get quiet and peaceful from doing it, but most of the time nothing seems to happen at all. My experiences were very good when I first started to follow this method, but they soon stopped and they don't happen much anymore. I am beginning to wonder if I am practising correctly.



*Saradamma*: How many times a day do you meditate and for how long?

*Question*: Usually two or three times, but sometimes, particularly in the last few days, I have been feeling that I should meditate all day. One day it might be quite effortless, but the next day my mind will be filled with thoughts, and I can't control it at all.

*Saradamma*: When you meditate do you sometimes get a headache or a lot of heat in the body?

*Question*: Yes, but especially when the mind is difficult to control.

*Saradamma*: This is what happens when you try to force the mind to do something that it doesn't want to do. When the mind sinks into the Heart there is a wonderful feeling of coolness. There is no heat and there is no pain. If there is heat and pain it means that the mind is still in the head. When this happens the more you try to force the mind to subside, the more it rebels. This only produces more heat and more pain. These symptoms are common among people who practise self-enquiry but they are rare in people who follow the path of devotion and surrender. I would suggest that you only do self-enquiry when it comes naturally and easily. For the rest of the time it will be more beneficial if you concentrate on the name and form of a Guru. Select a Guru for yourself and try to be aware of his name and form all the time. You will not be able to do self-enquiry all day and every day without the mind rebelling and causing pain. This is because of all the *vasanas* in the mind. Concentration on the name and form of a Guru will eliminate some of these *vasanas*, and this will enable you to do self-enquiry more easily.

*Question*: I am not even sure that self-enquiry is the right path for me. When I first started to meditate I used to repeat a *mantra*. It wasn't given to me by a Guru, I just started repeating it. It seemed to produce good results for a while, but the effect was not permanent. Then I switched to *pranayama* and the same thing happened. Now I have changed to self-enquiry and the same thing has happened again.

*Saradamma*: If you are having doubts about which technique you should do, or whether you are doing it correctly, you should find a Guru whom you trust and then follow his advice. Accept his judgement and don't doubt anything he says. If you want advice from me I would suggest that you hold onto the name and form of an enlightened one.

When I first came to Swamy I just used to repeat his name: '*Hare* Lakshmana, *Hare* Lakshmana'. It seemed to be very successful because after some time I started getting into these thought-free states. That was while I was still living in my parents' house in Gudur. However, while I was concentrating on the name alone, there was no peace or bliss; I just ended up in a state of *sunya*, or mental void. When I had been practising for some time Swamy's face started to appear in the void. I asked him what I should do about this because I thought that seeing his face was a thought; I was under the impression at that time that I should always be in a thought-free state. Actually, I was very proud of my thought-free states, and when I was complaining to Swamy that they were being disturbed by his face I was just showing off. It was just boasting. I wanted him to know that I was having long thought-free states while I was meditating. Swamy knew this of course and made fun of me. He said that the face had probably appeared because someone had put the evil-eye on me. He suggested that the next time it appeared I should do a *puja* to it and offer it some cashew nuts in the hope that it would go away and eat the nuts. I knew immediately that he was only joking; I also understood that it was beneficial for me to see his face while I was meditating. From then on the image became stronger and stronger. It was always laughing and every time I saw it I would be filled with a peace and bliss that was never present while I was only doing *japa*. The image appeared quite spontaneously and eventually it became so strong that I would see it in front of me even when my eyes were open. That is why I say that it is beneficial to concentrate on both name and form, and not merely on the name alone. Eventually, towards the end of my *sadhana*, the image of Swamy faded and I reverted to the thought-free states again. But this time there was a difference; they were not *sunya* states, they were filled with peace and bliss.

When you concentrate on God in the form of the Guru, he pulls you into himself and finally destroys you so completely that there is nothing left but God alone. He is like a murderer enticing a little child into his house with sweets. When the child trusts the killer enough it will happily walk into the house where it will end up being killed. When your trust and faith in God are strong, and when you have surrendered to him completely, he will pull you into his house and destroy you.

I reached this stage by concentrating on the name and form of Swamy, but I was only successful because I had absolute faith in Swamy, his teachings, and in the path I was following. You will not make any progress at all unless you have faith in your Guru and have faith that your chosen path will take you to the goal. You must select one spiritual path and stick to it. Having doubts about which path to take is like someone on a station platform who keeps thinking, "Shall I take this train? No, I think I'll take that train." Eventually he never takes any train at all because he can't make up his mind. If you don't take a decision about which train to catch you will never even leave the station.



I have only told you what worked for me. You may find a different path easier. Different people have different temperaments and inclinations, and what may work for one person may not work for another. For example, I was always distracted by thoughts when I meditated with my eyes closed. If I had been doing some work, then thoughts and pictures of me working would come up when I shut my eyes. If I opened my eyes and looked at Swamy's picture, all distracting thoughts would stop. Other people find that they have fewer distracting thoughts when they keep their eyes closed. You must find a technique that works for you and then stick to it.

*Question*: Both you and Swamy are emphatic about the need for a living Guru. I am a Christian. In the *Bible* Jesus said, shortly before he ascended into heaven, that his followers need not worry about personal guidance after he departs because he was going to send the holy spirit to look after them. Christians therefore believe that no human guidance is necessary and that one can attain salvation through the power of the holy spirit alone. This seems to conflict with the Hindu teaching that a human Guru is necessary.

*Saradamma*: You are full of doubts and questions about the need for a Guru, whether your practice is right etc.. The holy spirit does not seem to have answered these questions for you and put your mind at rest. If you can find a living Guru whom you can trust implicitly, then all your doubts will come to an end. You can surrender all your doubts and questions to him and then do your meditation without any distractions. Do you feel that you need a Guru?

*Question*: Yes, but I come from a religious tradition where Gurus are unknown. Part of me feels that if I concentrate on the name and form of Jesus as my Guru, then the holy spirit will guide me to the goal. Another part of me thinks that I will make better progress with a human Guru.

*Saradamma*: In your case I would advise you to select a suitable Guru for yourself. Some people feel that God alone will help them. When these people pray or meditate they will make progress unhindered by doubts about whether they should have a Guru or not. If you really feel that you need a Guru then concentrate on the name and form of your God. If your concentration and devotion are good then God will appear before you in the form of the Guru.

*Question*: I used to repeat the name of Jesus and once I concentrated on the picture of him that is revealed in the Turin shroud. Is this enough?

*Saradamma*: If your devotion is strong and if your desire for a Guru is strong then the Guru will appear.

*Question*: Christianity seems to teach many things that are opposed to the *advaita* teachings that you and Swamy propound. For example, you say that the individual self disappears at the moment of Self-realisation, leaving only the Self. In Christianity souls are held to be eternally separate from God. Even Jesus, although he is one with the Father is, in another sense, held to be distinct and separate from him. How are these differences to be reconciled?

*Saradamma*: Jesus was undoubtably a *jnani* who had experienced the non-dual Self. But he lived in a culture and a time when he could not openly admit that he was in the same state as, and in fact not different from God. So he had to tone down his teachings in order to make them acceptable to the religious authorities of his time. Even so, he was executed because of some of the things that he said. If he had told people the truth about the Self he would probably have been crucified even sooner than he was.

*Question*: In Christianity relationships are very important. There is the relationship between Jesus and God and between Christian believers and Jesus. Even the relationship between believers is important because there is a strong emphasis on communal prayer and worship. In *advaita* all relationships are negated since it is maintained that there is only a single indivisible reality. How is one to deal with relationships with other people when one knows or believes that all differences and relationships are illusory?

*Saradamma*: It is true that in the Self there are no differences and no relationships. But to reach that state one must have strong dispassion, detachment from the world and all the relationships one has in it. There is a story which illustrates this. A large fat man finds himself outside the entrance to a cave. There is a cool pleasant



breeze blowing from the cave but the man cannot get in because the entrance is very narrow and he is too fat to squeeze through it. Thinking that there must be something wonderful inside the cave, he becomes obsessed with the idea of getting in. He tries fasting but he can never lose enough weight to get through the crack no matter how many times he tries, or how little he eats. As his obsession increases he gives up his job and all dealings with his family and friends because he cannot stay away from the cave and the tantalising breeze that is blowing through its entrance. The man finally wastes away to skin and bone, but still he cannot get to the source of the breeze. He makes one last despairing effort to get through the crack but he gets stuck halfway. Finally he abandons his efforts completely as he realises that he can neither move forwards nor backwards. He then calls on God saying that he has done everything humanly possible, but now he is admitting defeat and leaving his body to God to do whatever he wishes with it. When God sees that this moment of complete physical and mental self-surrender has arrived he takes over and pulls the helpless man into the cave.

Similarly, in one's search for God, one cannot reach God until one has made a great physical effort, until one becomes obsessed with the thought of God alone and until one has given up all attachments and relationships. Even then that is not enough. One must realise that no physical or mental effort can take one to God. One must give up, mentally and physically, all idea of reaching God and one must finally throw oneself at God's feet and let him do whatever he wishes with you. When there is complete physical and mental self-surrender then God's grace takes you to the goal.

*Question*: You say that one must give up all idea of reaching or wanting God. I can understand that this is so on the path of surrender, but what about self-enquiry? If one is trying to reach the Self within surely a desire to get there will increase one's determination and concentration. Isn't this helpful?

*Saradamma*: So long as you set up the Self as a goal or target to be reached you will never experience it directly. The harder you try to get to it, the more it will recede away from you. You will only experience the Self when all desire for it has gone.

*Question*: Jesus says in the *Bible* that when two or three people are gathered together in his name, then he will be in the midst of them. This seems to indicate that collective prayer or meditation is more beneficial than practice by oneself. Is this so?

*Saradamma*: Does the *Bible* say that when one prays by oneself God is not present?
*Question*: No. Actually there is another passage in the *Bible* which says that when one prays one should find a private place where other people cannot see you.
*Saradamma*: It is all a matter of personal preference. If you find that it is helpful to meditate with other people then do so. If you prefer to be by yourself then meditate by yourself. It is the same with your meditation technique. Find something that works for you and then stick to it.

---

*Saradamma*: I realised the Self by meditating on Swamy's form. In the beginning I used to do *japa* of '*Hare* Lakshmana' but later I stopped and concentrated on his form alone. After some time I was able to sustain Swamy's image in my mind continuously with no other thoughts intruding. As my practice progressed I was even able to visualise him outside the body. Eventually a point was reached when no matter where I looked I saw only Swamy. This practice was very good, but the best results came from meditating on him in the Heart.

If you want to meditate on me or Swamy it is not good to think of us as objects separate from you. Meditate on us in the Heart for we are really inside you, not outside you. In the later stages of my *sadhana* I always used to meditate on Swamy in the Heart. Sometimes he would fill my being so completely that I could actually feel that I was Swamy. My face would feel as if it had taken on the shape of Swamy's face and there was a feeling that Swamy had entered or taken over my whole body. By meditating on Swamy in this way I could feel that Swamy and I were one and not separate.

Swamy and I are in your Heart; meditate on us in the Heart and you will discover that we are not apart from you. When you look at our bodies you are only looking at an image created by your mind. Meditate on us in the Heart and you will discover that we are your own Self.
*Question*: When you say 'meditate on us in the Heart' do you mean that I should visualise an image in the Heart-centre in the same way that you used to do before you realised the Self?
*Saradamma*: No, that is not the real Heart meditation; it is just an exercise in concentration. Meditating in the Heart really means that



you should make the mind go back into the Heart so that you can experience the bliss of the Self there. If you are thinking about anything, even mine or Swamy's form, then the mind is still active. While the mind is still active it will not sink back into its source. If you can give up all thoughts and make the mind completely silent and still, then it will automatically sink into the Heart. Meditation in the Heart really begins when the mind rests quietly in the Heart, absorbed in the bliss of the Self.